Eric Hunt
EricSisu@proton.me
VIA CERTIFIED MAIL, RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED
October 7, 2025
Irene Weisberg Zisblatt
9400 NW 13th St
Plantation, FL 33322

Re: Cease and Desist – Defamatory False Statements at 2024 Union College Appearance and in *The Fifth Diamond* Second Edition; Demand for Public Apology and Video Retraction to Eric Hunt, Settlement Negotiations, Transfer of Diamond Pendant, and Assignment of Book Rights;

Ms. Zisblatt,

This letter serves as a formal demand, pursuant to § 770.01, Fla. Stat., that you, Irene Weisberg Zisblatt, immediately cease and desist from publishing, promoting, or disseminating false and defamatory statements about your alleged Holocaust experiences, including but not limited to claims made in the 1998 documentary *The Last Days*, your 2008 book *The Fifth Diamond* (ISBN 978-1593931396), the 2020 second edition (ISBN 978-1-6480-4957-6), and public appearances, specifically the November 7, 2024, Union College event in Schenectady, New York. These statements, including your claim in *The Fifth Diamond* second edition, promoted at Union College, that “There are those who say the Holocaust never happened. I am one of the workers against those who tirelessly deny the Holocaust. Those who deny will not succeed because we remember,” have caused severe harm to me, Eric Hunt, as a child victim, public critic, and advocate for protecting children from false atrocity tales. You made false claims, including graphic narratives targeting children, and directed your lawyer and son-in-law, Stuart Mermelstein, to defame me as a “notorious Holocaust denier” in Florida newspapers (e.g., Sun-Sentinel, Oct. 6, 2009, still online), rather than acknowledge the falsity of your claims, which have harmed me from age 16 to the present. Your daughter, Robin Mermelstein, has actively participated in promoting these false claims on camera in multiple public appearances (to be detailed at trial). Your 2009 lawsuit response put Mr. Mermelstein and Ms. Mermelstein on notice of these falsehoods, including that the alleged diamond pendant was not publicly mentioned until 1998, yet they continued to promote your claims, making them liable for post-2009 harms. These actions, directed by you, are repeated today and falsely portray me, damaging my reputation and causing severe ongoing reputational harm. I demand that you issue a public apology and video retraction addressed to Eric Hunt, retract the specific book quote, enter good-faith settlement negotiations, transfer ownership of the alleged diamond pendant, and assign all rights to *The Fifth Diamond* to avoid litigation.

Be advised: I am not a violent threat, nor am I physically present in the United States or the State of Florida, as I reside overseas, living in exile due to the stigma and harms from your false claims. I intend to act only legally through this demand and litigation against you and potentially Robin Mermelstein and Stuart Mermelstein. Any attempts by you, Mr. Mermelstein, or Ms. Mermelstein to further defame me by misrepresenting my beliefs, character, mental state, or actions, including this letter or the 2007 Wiesel incident—where, leaving my camera upstairs

and seeing Elie Wiesel alone for a TMZ-style interview attempt, I grabbed his sleeve, pulled him two feet, let go immediately, backed up, and said, “I want to interview you,” only to be freed and acquitted of misrepresented charges after a politically motivated show trial—will result in additional lawsuits for defamation and related claims. This is a lawful exercise of my First Amendment rights. Any further denigration of me by you or your representatives at your direction is not protected speech but defamation and a knowing and willing cover for your many false claims and may result in further legal action against son-in-law and lawyer Stuart. Mermelstein and daughter Robin Mermelstein, who you live with and collaborate to disseminate your defamatory falsehoods, as co-conspirators under § 777.04, Fla. Stat., based on their documented actions.

False and Defamatory Statements

You, Ms. Zisblatt, have repeatedly publicized false statements, knowing they were untrue and morally wrong, particularly when targeting children with graphic, fictional narratives. You claimed that during your time in Auschwitz in 1944, you:

1. Repeatedly swallowed and defecated four diamonds, originally sewn into your dress by your mother, retrieved them from your feces multiple times (including during Mengele selections), sometimes washing them in soup or mud, and turned them into a teardrop-shaped pendant presented as a “family heirloom” to be passed to Robin and her firstborn female child. No public mention of this alleged diamond pendant was made until 1998 in *The Last Days*, and your 1993 testimony mentions swallowing three diamonds once before your first Auschwitz shower without retrieval. Mr. Mermelstein and Ms. Mermelstein, aware of my 2009 lawsuit highlighting this discrepancy, should have known the pendant claim was false yet continued to promote it, including Ms. Mermelstein’s on-camera appearances.
2. Survived Dr. Josef Mengele’s alleged inhumane medical experiments, including alleged tests to determine how eyesight reacts to days in darkness, later changed to blue eye-color change experiments in a water-filled dungeon, despite not being a twin or Gypsy (Roma), the primary groups Mengele targeted, and despite no historical evidence supporting such experiments to change eyes to make them more blue. Zero records exist of you as a Mengele research subject, though a disease-screening stool sample record exists (to be entered at trial).
3. Your 1993 video “testimony” claims you received six months of painful skin grafts from your buttocks to your forearm (to cover a non-existent Auschwitz tattoo number you never received in the first place and falsely claimed as your own, taken from another prisoner), a medically and historically impossible procedure. Records prove you were not in Auschwitz for six months but a shorter period of time before being transited. You show your tattoo-free and scar-less forearm in public, and likely at the 2024 Union appearance, as supposed proof of your horrific experimental medical torture. In your book and elsewhere you falsely claim being branded with Auschwitz tattoo number “61397,” which surviving evidence prove was actually assigned on September 9, 1943, to Agnieszka Pastuszek, a non-Jewish Polish political prisoner. This constitutes stolen valor fraud, as Hungarian Jewish women received numbers A-3622 to A-6027 from May

16–26, 1944. At the time of mass Hungarian transports, people like you simply were never tattooed. You were never tattooed, but stole another prisoner's number and invented a fiction about having six months of skin grafts from, as you say in 1993 on video "your butt" to your forearm. Later, you leave out the buttocks part and just claim Mengele himself tortured the number out of your arm by "pulling" "and ripping" things out of your arm while you lost consciousness on a rusty table (Shoah video, Fifth Diamond, others) . (Exhibit A: Joachim Neander critique, holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.com, Jan. 2010).

4. Claiming Adolf Eichmann himself personally removed you and sent you to the gas chamber while delivering monologues, later changed to Mengele, with no historical evidence for Eichmann's presence at Auschwitz in 1944. Claiming to have avoided a Gypsy gassing, personally standing up to Eichmann himself, because you wanted to die with Jews, a wholly unsupported narrative. Escaping this Birkenau gas chamber by walking backwards out of it, then by being thrown over a 10-foot electrified fence into an open topped cattle car, unsupported by documentation or feasibility which shows the distance would have been 100 feet away, later entirely revised to omit such an impossible claim in post-2017 promotions (e.g., "Talks at Google") after another victim of your falsehoods, Alison Chabloz's 2017 UK prosecution for mocking this gas chamber escape and fence throw claim in a song.
5. Other fabrications, including:
    - Receiving a "lethal injection" during a selection that made you woozy but did not kill you.
    - Being selected in 1944 for your smooth skin to become a human skin lampshade for Ilse Koch, being transited across Poland to Majdanek for this purpose, where Koch didn't show up, despite her 1943 imprisonment.
    - Claiming to have seen Adolf Hitler at Auschwitz, despite no evidence of his visit.
    - In 1993 footage, claiming to have swallowed ***three*** diamonds once without ever mentioning retrieval, predating your four-diamond story (to be entered at trial).
    - Claiming painful injections under your fingernails, unsupported by any record.
6. Associated with Paul Parks' fraudulent U.S. Army Normandy and Dachau liberator claims in *The Last Days*, promoted at the 2024 Union College event, prompting my good-faith protest to staff, which was misrepresented as a "terrorist threat" to the FBI's Albany Joint Terrorism Task Force.
7. Stated in *The Fifth Diamond* second edition: "There are those who say the Holocaust never happened. I am one of the workers against those who tirelessly deny the Holocaust. Those who deny will not succeed because we remember." This falsely portrays you as a truthful witness remembering reality and defames me, as you made false claims, targeting children, and directed Stuart Mermelstein to defame me as a "notorious Holocaust denier" in Florida newspapers (e.g., Sun-Sentinel, Oct. 6, 2009, still online), repeated today, causing ongoing harm. Ms. Mermelstein's on-camera promotion of these claims post-2009, despite my lawsuit, further amplifies this harm.

These claims are false. Jewish Holocaust researcher Joachim Neander, Ph.D., after my 2009 lawsuit and using evidence I uncovered, found no evidence of your Mengele experiments, as

you were neither a twin nor Gypsy, and no documentation supports eye-color experiments in a dungeon (Exhibit A: Neander's 2010 analysis, stating the testimony is "not in order" and a "work of fiction"). The Times of Israel reported Neander's "serious doubts" about your *The Last Days* testimony (Exhibit B: Times of Israel, Aug. 4, 2021). David G. Marwell and my own recent scholarship on anthropologist Mengele, further disproves your claims of "Frankenstein-like" experiments, aligning with prior witnesses' disproven perjury. Your continued promotion, with Mr. Mermelstein's and Ms. Mermelstein's assistance post-2009, despite my lawsuit highlighting the 1998 introduction of the pendant claim, and other fraudulent claims including those listed above, shows malice.

Harm Caused

Your false statements, including the book quote, Mr. Mermelstein's directed smears, and Ms. Mermelstein's on-camera promotion, have caused me severe harm:

- **Childhood Trauma**: At age 16 in 2000, I was shown *The Last Days* at school, featuring your false claims and Parks' fraudulent liberator story, causing confusion and distress, confirmed by my U.S. Army veteran grandfather's rejection of Parks' claims. This gaslighting contributed to the 2007 Wiesel incident and ongoing severe repercussions.
- **Reputational Damage**: As your critic since 2009, via my lawsuit, rather than come clean, you directed Stuart Mermelstein to defame me as a "lunatic" and "Holocaust denier" in Florida newspapers (e.g., Sun-Sentinel, Oct. 6, 2009, still online), while mocking the merits of my claims and using your considerable connections against me, these defamatory claims still repeated avaiable online, accessed, and used against me today. My filing this lawsuit led to my unjust 2009 Nebraska commitment, as my mother and law enforcement believed your story must have been vetted by experts and I must be out of my mind to question a "survivor of Mengele's barbaric experiments". In 2024, my good-faith contact with Union College to warn of your false claims was misrepresented as a "terrorist threat," prompting a report to the FBI Albany Joint Terrorism Task Force, investigation and scrutiny.
- **Emotional and Physical Distress**: Your actions caused severe emotional distress, including a bipolar diagnosis, forced medication, unjust imprisonment, PTSD from living in Ukraine in exile at the start of the full scale war, significant weight loss from November 2024 to January 2025, inability to eat solid foods for three weeks after your Union College appearance due to distress from your graphic claims, estrangement from my mother for a decade due to her belief in your false claims, current fear of returning to the U.S. and arrest due to misrepresentations of my 2024 Union College contact, and relocation costs and other costs(to be detailed at trial). Your refusal to retract in 2009 and continued defamation, prolonged this, ruining my career and life for 16 years.
- **Harm to Others, especially children**: Your claims harmed children, as evidenced by a 2008 incident at Columbia High School, Maplewood, New Jersey, where a student doubting your diamond claim, their father researched your false claims, and then was bullied as a "anti-semitic" and Holocaust denier(Exhibit C). Critics like Alison Chabloz faced 2017 UK prosecution for mocking your gas chamber claim. Your supporters' death

threats against me and my family (e.g., “visit with a shotgun”) forced me into exile, requiring me to fear displaying my face in my art, research, and documentaries, as your narrative falsely portrays me as a delusional liar, and you as a torture victim of sadistic “Mengele experiments” inciting harm from those you presented your false and damaging claims to.

Your continued dissemination of these false claims, with Stuart and Robin’s assistance, despite my 2009 lawsuit, 2024 FBI scrutiny, and knowledge of critics’ punishment, demonstrates actual malice and reckless disregard for the truth, causing presumed and actual damages.

Demands

To avoid litigation for defamation per se, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and violations of the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act (FDUTPA), I demand that you:

1. **Immediately Cease and Desist**: Stop all publication, promotion, or dissemination of the above false statements, including in *The Fifth Diamond*, *The Last Days*, public appearances, and media.
2. **Issue a Public Apology and Video Retraction**: Within **5 days** of receipt, issue a public apology and video retraction under § 770.01, Fla. Stat., admitting the falsity of your claims (diamonds, Mengele experiments, skin grafts, lethal injection, Ilse Koch lampshade, gas chamber escape, stolen tattoo number, Hitler sighting, Eichmann/Mengele monologues, Gypsy gassing avoidance, three diamonds, fingernail injections) and specifically retracting the statement in *The Fifth Diamond*: “There are those who say the Holocaust never happened. I am one of the workers against those who tirelessly deny the Holocaust. Those who deny will not succeed because we remember.” This falsely portrays you as a truthful witness and defames me as a liar, as you made false claims, targeting children, and directed Mr. Mermelstein to defame me in Florida newspapers, with Ms. Mermelstein’s on-camera promotion amplifying this harm. The video retraction must be addressed to Eric Hunt, acknowledge the harm caused, and be published on platforms where the statements were made (e.g., Union College website, YouTube, Stuart Mermelstein’s law firm website, or equivalent).
3. **Enter Settlement Negotiations**: Engage in good-faith discussions within **10 days** of receipt to settle financially for damages caused, including my childhood trauma, reputational harm, emotional distress, family estrangement due to their believing your false claims were properly vetted, and economic losses, including financial platform deplatforming, severe career repercussions, social stigma, and relocation costs.
4. **Transfer the Diamond Pendant**: Relinquish ownership of the falsely alleged defecated diamonds pendant to me as part of the settlement, given its role in your false narrative.
5. **Assign Book Rights**: Transfer all rights to *The Fifth Diamond*, including publishing and intellectual property rights, to me to prevent further dissemination and compensate for harm.
6. **Provide Written Confirmation**: Within **7 days** of receipt, confirm in writing to EricSisu@proton.me that you have received this letter, ceased all false statements,

issued the apology and video retraction, and are prepared to negotiate the settlement, pendant transfer, and book rights assignment.

Failure to comply will result in legal action. First, a lawsuit for defamation per se, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and FDUTPA violations, seeking compensatory and punitive damages, injunctive relief, and other remedies. I am prepared to present evidence, including historical critiques (Joachim Neander, Exhibit A; Times of Israel, Exhibit B), family communications on the pre-1998 non-existence of the diamond pendant, Ms. Mermelstein's on-camera promotion, Mengele research, your non-twin/non-Gypsy status, Parks' fraud, the Maplewood incident (Exhibit C), and critics' punishment (2009 Nebraska commitment, to be detailed at trial; 2024 FBI scrutiny, to be detailed at trial; 2017 Chabloz prosecution, to be detailed at trial).

Governing Law

This matter is governed by Florida law, including Florida Statutes § 770.01 (defamation), § 768.295 (anti-SLAPP), § 501.201 et seq. (FDUTPA), and § 777.04 (conspiracy) (with Mr. Mermelstein and Ms. Mermelstein). Your actions constitute defamation per se (injuring my reputation and profession), intentional infliction of emotional distress (outrageous conduct causing severe harm), and FDUTPA violations (deceptive trade practices), with actual malice given your knowledge of the falsity, targeting of children, and punishment of critics.
Direct all communications to EricSisu@proton.me. The return mailing address is not my physical address, as I am overseas; do not send physical mail to that address, as it is used solely for certified mail delivery. I urge you to consult counsel and respond promptly to avoid further legal action. This letter is sent via certified mail with return receipt requested.
Sincerely,
/s/ Eric Hunt
Eric Hunt
[Your Phone Number]
EricSisu@proton.me (mailto:EricSisu@proton.me)
Attachments:

- Exhibit A: Joachim Neander critique (holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.com, Jan. 2010)
- Exhibit B: Times of Israel article (Aug. 4, 2021, blogs.timesofisrael.com/questionable-testimony-in-holocaust-doc-is-grist-for-deniers/)
- Exhibit C: Maplewood School parent message board discussion Maplewood Online - Holocaust survivor spoke at SOMS, questions
  https://maplewood.worldwebs.com/forums/discussion/holocaust-survivor-spoke-at-soms-questions?page=next

Holocaust Controversies

What Part Of The Word *Genocide* Do You Not Understand?

OUR WHITE PAPER

Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. Holocaust Denial and Operation Reinhard. A Critique of the Falsehoods of Mattogno, Graf and Kues. Read it on the blog or download as pdf with 570 pages.

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 09, 2010

Irene Zisblatt, the "Diamond Girl" - Fact or Fiction?

by Joachim Neander, PhD, independent scholar

(Last revised: 10.01.2010; 2 typos corrected: 04.02.2010)

[Today our guest blogger is Dr. Joachim Neander from Cracow, Poland. Dr. Neander has degrees in mathematics (Saarbrücken University, 1962) and history (Göttingen and Bremen Universities, 1997). He is the author of *Mathematik und Ideologie*, München 1974, *Das Konzentrationslager Mittelbau in der Endphase der NS-Diktatur*, Clausthal-Zellerfeld 1997, 4th ed. 2001, *Gardelegen 1945*, Magdeburg 1998, *"Hat in Europa kein annäherndes Beispiel" ... Mittelbau-Dora, ein KZ für Hitlers Krieg*, Berlin 2000.

He is a contributor to *PRO MEMORIA* (Oświęcim, Poland), *Informationen des Studienkreises Deutscher Widerstand* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), *German Studies Review* (Carleton College, USA), *Yad Vashem Studies* (Jerusalem, Israel), *Newsletter des Fritz-Bauer-Instituts* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), *theologie.geschichte* (Saarland University, Germany) and other scholarly publications. In 2001-2002 he had a Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellowship for Archival Research at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Guest bloggers' opinions are not necessarily shared by the HC team, nor do we endorse each and every argument made by our guests.

This item is placed here solely to facilitate further discussion.]

Irene Zisblatt, the "Diamond Girl" - Fact or Fiction?

An Amazing Story of Survival in the Holocaust

Irene Zisblatt, a petite (5ft. 1")[1] blonde, energetic lady nearing her eighties, is a remarkable personality. Her life-story, as told by her in her memoir *The Fifth Diamond*,[2] begins in Polena,[3] a small spa town in Subcarpathian Ruthenia,[4] where she grew up as Chana Seigelstein.[5] From her memoir and newspaper reports, we must conclude that she was born in 1931.[6] She survived ghettoization in Hungary, deportation to Auschwitz, transfer to concentration camp Neuengamme, she says, slave labor in a munitions factory, and a months-long death march that led her into Czechoslovakia, where she eventually was liberated on the eve of VE Day by soldiers of the U.S. Third Army. After recovering from typhus in a U.S. Army hospital near Pilsen, she claims, she went to a DP camp in Austria, waiting for an opportunity to emigrate to the U.S. She obtained a visa in 1947, had her first name changed to Irene, and went to New York, where she was heartily welcomed by family members who had emigrated already before World War II. She settled there, married twice, and gave birth to two children.

She never talked to anybody about her wartime experience until 1994, when she attended a screening of *Schindler's List*. Since that time, she has been traveling across the U.S., sharing her experience with high school and college students, always receiving broad coverage in the local media. According to *The Press* of Atlantic City NJ from April 28, 2009, she "is booked twice a day between two and five times a week," and until the end of 2009 she "will have shared her story of surviving the Holocaust with about as many people as Jewish lives were claimed during World War II," i.e. "six million" listeners and viewers.[7] In addition, since 1994 she has been a regular participant in the March of the Living in Poland. In October 1995, she was interviewed for Steven

FEATURED POST

Nazi Document on Extermination of Je Auschwitz-Birkena Franke-Gricksch R

WHAT'S HOT?

Rebutting the "Twitter d the most popular denier debunked

Nazi shrunken heads, h skin lampshades, huma textiles from human hai Sorting out the truth fro legends.

Mattogno's Einsatzgrup book is shown to be a ti lies and ignorance

Debunking the popular videos (incl. David Cole "Proven at Nuremberg"

A (not so) short debunki the "Holocaust Deprogr Course"

Rebuttal of deniers on g

Challenge to Supporters Revisionist Transit Cam

Index of Published Evid Mass Extermination in Auschwitz

Exposing the deceptive Mattogno's deep ignora

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Extermination camp Kul (Chelmno): documentar

Series:That's why it is d not revisionism.

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Om Förintelsen

Holocausto-Doc

Nizkor Project

HOLOCAUST, GENOCI CRIMES, RACISM

Auschwitz-Birkenau Me and Museum

Danuta Czech Kalendar (Italian translation)

Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation*.[8] She was one of the five Holocaust survivors that were chosen to tell their story in the award-winning documentary movie *The Last Days*, [9] released in 1998. Finally, in 2008 her memoir *The Fifth Diamond* appeared in print.

Mrs. Zisblatt obviously is a gifted narrator and has an extraordinary ability to deeply impress her audience. She tells an amazing story of a little Jewish girl who outwits notorious Nazis and survives repeated assaults on her life, and who personally experienced innumerable humiliations and atrocities, which, however, were never able to destroy her human dignity, nor her will to survive and to testify. She tells about a wonderful, deep friendship with a slightly older Lithuanian Jewish girl, crucial for both to survive against all odds but ending tragically by the death of her friend on VE Day. Selfless help experienced by a nurse in the camp hospital and a Jewish *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz and by her U.S. liberators set highlights of humanity in a deeply inhumane environment.

Doubts

An intelligent reader, however, who has read some scholarly literature about Auschwitz and Neuengamme, as well as one or more memoirs of undisputed survivors of these camps, and uses common sense cannot but question the authenticity and credibility of Mrs. Zisblatt's memoir. On the one hand, her story is overburdened - she does not leave out a single Nazi atrocity ever reported by survivors of the camps, ghettos, and *Einsatzgruppen* shootings. She, too, serves her audience with all common Holocaust stereotypes and myths.[10] On the other hand, her description of the life at Auschwitz and, to a far greater extent, at Neuengamme, is astonishingly vague, and where details are given, the narration is frequently inconsistent or conflicts with the established historical facts.

But does it make sense to grasp the scalpel of scholarly reasoning and dissect the story told and retold by a sympathetic elderly lady as the story of her life, a heart-rendering story that makes crowds of students burst out in tears of empathy (if we can trust the media reports), and which is fervently defended by readers and listeners against all criticism?[11] "It is her goal to educate children in order to rid the world of prejudice, intolerance, and indifference," says the blurb of her book. Is this not a noble aim, worth our full support, and does she not excel at attaining this goal? Can we, in the face of a rising tide of antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia, really risk to lose a successful warrior against this evil?

And do scholars not know that no survivor memoir is free from occasional exaggerations, from presenting rumors as reality, and even from historical inaccuracies? Has Nobel Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel not reminded us that "Some stories are true that never happened?" It is not easy to answer these questions. But let us remind that no serious scholar would dismiss a survivor's memoir that has a few factual flaws - with emphasis on "a few." And Elie Wiesel had in his mind stories that, though being fictional, contain a deeper truth and comply with certain logical and literary standards.

Let us look at yet another aspect. Is it morally acceptable to criticize a Holocaust survivor's story, hurting her feelings and those of thousands of people who believe her? The answer must be: In this case, yes. Mrs. Zisblatt has gone public with a dubious story, and in a free society, she and her followers must stand scholarly criticism of it, even if it hurts. But are there not the Holocaust deniers, who already have attacked Mrs. Zisblatt on the Web and even at court? Do we not feed grist to their mills when we expose her story - a survivor's account - as unreliable? Would this not be a convincing argument for keeping silent? The answer must be: No. Society must neither be afraid of a handful of cranks, nor let them decide on what to do and what not to do. Moreover, the truth will come to light anyhow, sooner or later.

Teaching falsehood, even with the best intentions, is always dangerous and counterproductive. Human beings have an inborn tendency to think. What if the kids, who were deeply impressed by Mrs. Zisblatt's story, some day reach for a scholarly book about the Holocaust or a memoir vetted by experts and find out that things could not have happened as told by her? Have we forgotten the lesson of the pig's heart, exhibited at Buchenwald in a jar as "the heart of a political prisoner, shot through by an SS man," together with a fake "human-skin" lampshade?[12] Hundreds of thousands of school children in the former German Democratic Republic have shivered, on the occasion of their obligatory Buchenwald visit, before these "undeniable witnesses of Nazi crimes." When, after the collapse of Communism, the artifacts went into the museum's magazine,[13] quite a few people began to doubt other Nazi crimes, about which they had learned at school and in the media.

This said, let us take a critical look at Mrs. Zisblatts story as told in *The Fifth Diamond*. In some instances, we will also consult the video tape of her interview for the Shoah Foundation, as she gives more details there. To avoid too many footnotes, numbers in round brackets will refer to pages in her book.

Hungary

Documentation Center
Cambodia
Dokumentations- und
Kulturzentrum Deutsche
und Roma
Execution sites of Jewis
victims investigated by
in-Unum
Forced Labor 1939-194
Gedenkbuch Opfer der
Verfolgung der Juden u
nationalsozialistischen
Gewaltherrschaft in
Deutschland 1933-1945
Genocide Archive of Rw
Ghetto Fighters House
Holocaust Atlas of Lithu
HolocaustHistory.Site
Institute for the Study of
Academic Racism
Justiz und NS-Verbrech
Katyn Files
Memorial (Moscow)
NS-Archiv
NS-Haftstätten und Lag
Nuremberg Trials
Nuremberg Trials Proje
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Our Reference Library
sonderkommando.info
State Museum at Majda
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Yugoslavia
United States Holocaus
Memorial Museum
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Mrs. Zisblatt tells us that in the spring of 1942 (1), when she was nine years old[14] and just had finished her second school year, a decree to the effect that "Jewish children can no longer attend the public school" was called out in Polena (1). Chana has to leave school. From that moment, she receives home-schooling by her mother, whereas her non-Jewish classmates continue to attend school (2). In the spring of 1944, however, her former school is closed and serves as a collecting point for "Jews from neighboring towns . . . to await deportation" (21).

This narration contains several inconsistencies. First, if her former school was closed and used as a transit camp for deportations in 1944, it must have been a Jewish and not a public school. Second, if Chana was born in 1931, she must have been nine years old already in 1940, and not in 1942. Third, the Jewish laws issued in Hungary between 1939 and 1941 did severely restrict the number of Jewish students in secondary and high school education, but did not affect primary schooling.[15]

We further read about government decrees demanding from Jews to hand in their radio receivers (5), to wear a yellow star on the left side of their chests (6), and to prepare for relocation. "Each person is to take a bag not to exceed twenty-five kilos" (6). Jews were also forced to give up their valuables (6). All this allegedly happened in "April 1942" (1). This is historically false. The above mentioned anti-Jewish measures were, indeed, taken, but two years later, after the Germans had invaded the country on March 19, 1944, and established a puppet regime in Budapest.

We find also two Holocaust stereotypes already in the beginning of her narration. There are the two mysterious men that had escaped from Poland and spent one night at the Seigelsteins' home. They tell about the merciless, large-scale Nazi extermination of the Jews in Poland and warn their hosts (14). The informed reader at once remembers the story of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler.[16] The family then moves into a hideout in the attic (21), living there in complete silence, without light and fire for heating or cooking (22). Similarities to the story of Anne Frank catch the reader's eye, and like the Franks, the Seigelsteins are eventually betrayed to the Nazis.

On the second night of Passover 1944, "Nazi soldiers, along with the feather-headed [Hungarian] policemen," storm the hideout (25) and herd the family, together with other Jews from the town, to the railway station, beating and shouting. The non-Jewish neighbors line the streets and applaud (26) - another Holocaust stereotype. The Jews are taken to the Sajovits ghetto of Munkács,[17] the district capital (27). Some time later, they are crammed into a box car of a deportation train. After a journey of five days, they arrive at Birkenau (30).

Arrival at Birkenau

The author gives very few hints that would enable the reader to correlate events in her story with calendar dates. This, however, is common in survivor memoirs, and it alone does not speak against her. We can, however, fix her arrival at Birkenau between May 16 and 26, 1944, when the deportation transports from Munkács arrived there.[18] At the ramp, Chana is forcefully separated from her family by an SS man "with a smiling face wearing white gloves and carrying a baton-like stick in his hand" (34). The initiate at once will recognize SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. phil. Dr. med. Josef Mengele, although his name is not yet mentioned. Whereas her whole family walks to the gas chamber (34-35), Chana is spared.

Being selected on arrival at the "ramp" by Mengele is another Holocaust stereotype. It did happen, but not as often as reported by survivors.[19] What is more, Mengele was first and foremost looking for twins[20] and people with physical abnormalities, in who he was "scientifically" interested.[21] It is very improbable that he would have worried about a normal-looking, thirteen-year old, four feet tall girl,[22] who was neither a twin, nor would ever have passed the "Mengele test" described in other survivors' memoirs: Children who were smaller than a measuring rod of 1.50 meters length (≈ 5 ft.), were immediately sent by him to the gas chamber.[23]

Chana and the other women who were not selected for gassing on arrival, now are herded by SS personnel and their dogs into the prisoner reception building.[24] Here the newly arrived are forced to undress completely and to hand out all valuables. Chana's head is completely shaved, and she receives the prisoner number 61397, which is tattooed on her arm (35).[25] Near by, she witnesses "women workers removing fillings and crowns, pulling gold teeth" from the registered prisoners (36). Before leaving, she receives "a pajama top" as her "only article of clothing," and she is "forced to look into [a] large mirror" at the door, where she does not recognize herself - an additional act of humiliation. She is then marched, together with one thousand other women, "into a place called Birkenau," to a wooden barrack (36) in "Lager C" (51), better known as "Camp sector BIIc."

Apart from the fact that the prisoner reception building nowhere had "a huge mirror" into which the prisoners were forced to look, and that the *Zugänge* (intakes) received a little bit more of clothing than a pajama top that barely would have covered their nakedness,[26] the narration contains three major implausibilities. First, the Auschwitz prisoner number "61397" was given on September 9, 1943, to

Agnieszka Pastuszek, a non-Jewish, Polish political prisoner,[27] who had arrived with a prisoner transport from Katowice prison.[28]. Hungarian Jewish women prisoners who were taken in between May 16 and 26, 1944, received numbers from A-3622 to A-6027.[29] Chana could also not have received the number of a dead prisoner because after February 2, 1942, Auschwitz prisoner numbers were no more issued twice.[30]

Second, the plundering of dental gold was carried out on the corpses of the dead, but never on living prisoners on intake. Third, if Chana had been registered on arrival, she would have been sent to one of the "regular" women camps, such as BIa or BIb. BIIc was used during the "Hungarian action" as a transit camp for non-registered Jewish women - who, therefore, had not been tattooed - and who on arrival had been spared from gassing. SS doctors regularly combed the transit camp for deportees who would be shipped into the Reich's interior for slave labor (without registration at Auschwitz) or taken in at Auschwitz (and then registered there), and those who were sent to the gas chamber.[31]

Majdanek - there and back

The day after Chana's arrival and intake at Birkenau, she and about one hundred other women are selected by Mengele from her barrack (43-44). They have to parade naked before Mengele and a group of other SS men. In a multi-step selection process, Chana and fourteen other young women eventually are chosen. Each of them receives "a striped dress," on whose back "the letters *KL Katzes Lager*, concentration camp, were painted in white paint." The group boards a train "to a place called Majdanek." On the way from the station to the camp through the city[32] she "could see revulsion, loathing, and disgust" on the faces of the "beautifully dressed" people in the street (44) - again a Holocaust stereotype.[33] Let us remark only that the blue and gray striped concentration camp dress at Auschwitz never had *KL Katzes Lager* painted on its back[34] - another incorrect information given by the author.

Chana soon realizes that she and the other fourteen Jewish girls were selected for a horrible fate: to become a lampshade (45). Ilse Koch, "an SS woman . . . a maniac . . . [who] likes human gloves made out of human skin and lampshades," is "coming to Majdanek to select her material for the lampshades, and we have the skin for it." Mrs. Koch, however, does not show up. [35] Small wonder, since she, as of August 25, 1943, has been sitting behind bars in the Weimar, Germany, Gestapo prison.[36] So, "after forty-eight immeasurable hours," the group returns to Auschwitz, without having achieved anything (45).

Though long since debunked as a contemporary legend, lampshades allegedly made from victims of the Holocaust are a stock phrase in Holocaust remembrance.[37] It is, therefore, not surprising to find the legend in a book that serves its readers with nearly all Holocaust clichés. As the lampshade story was a Buchenwald camp rumor that spread from there not before the liberation of this camp (April 11, 1945), it can be excluded that it was known in Auschwitz and Majdanek already eleven months earlier. By the way, in Mrs. Zisblatt's version, "Ilsa [*sic*] Koch was choosing women with beautiful skin" for her lampshades (45). In the original version of the legend, however, Mrs. Koch, the "Bitch of Buchenwald," was only interested in well-built men with gorgeous tattoos. All the signs are that Mrs. Zisblatt's near-lampshade experience is nothing but the fruit of a prolific imagination.

*[**Note by the Holocaust Controversies**: there is in fact evidence that one or two lampshades were constructed from tanned pieces of human skin in Buchenwald, although there is no credible evidence that Ilse Koch was directly involved, that anyone was killed in order to make the lampshades or that the skin of Jewish inmates was used.]*

Everyday Life at Birkenau

Mrs. Zisblatt writes that she stayed eight months at Birkenau (149). This, however, is at odds with her narration, according to which she cannot have spent more than five months there. She mentions to have been at Birkenau on Yom Kippur (69), which, in 1944, fell on September 27, and Simchat Torah (70), which fell on October 10, 1944. She also writes that she was witness to the famous *Sonderkommando* mutiny (72), which occurred on October 7, 1944.[38] Some time after this event, she is selected for the gas chamber, but survives (74) and leaves Birkenau the same day (76). This must have been already in October 1944, as the last gassing took place on October 30, 1944.[39] Before the beginning of winter, she is already in Neuengamme (79). All this means that she must have left Birkenau sometime in the second half of October 1944, which in turn means that she did not stay in Auschwitz longer than five months.

Chana's days at Birkenau begin with roll call (*Zählappell*)[40] (37, 41, 55), followed by exercising (41). The weather is always cold (51), typical for Poland (74), sometimes it is raining (74), in October freezing (70), and when she leaves, Birkenau is even already covered with snow.[41] The prisoners are tortured with senseless work: "Men and women aimlessly carried stones from one side of the camp to the other" (42, 56). "Each day we carried rocks from one pile to another and back" (51).[42]

For a short period of time, Chana is assigned to a *Kanada* work detail (59).[43] Food is totally insufficient: "Our daily ration was watery soup every twenty-four hours" (37).[44] The prisoners are not allowed to speak to one another. Violations are threatened with the death penalty (41). Block elders and kapos have "supreme authority over life and death" (42). The six[45] crematoria (71) of Birkenau are operating round the clock. Their chimneys are "blazing" (41), "burning" (70), and "spewing ashes" (42) that "encrust the mud" (41). On Simchat Torah, their "flames blaze brighter than the sun," and "hot ashes" even fall around on the prisoners (70, 71).

Mrs. Zisblatt's description is rife with exaggerations and inaccuracies. First, a *Standortbefehl* from February 14, 1944, ordered that roll calls from now on have to take place only once a day in the evening, though, in some instances, exceptions seem to have occurred.[46] Second, in 1944 the summer in southern Poland was long, dry and hot, so that even the water table at Birkenau fell sufficiently to allow for open-pit burning of the victims' corpses. Third, food rations doubtlessly were insufficient at Birkenau, but it is implausible that Chana has been living on a daily ration of one bowl of watery soup. Without the piece of bread that the prisoners got in the evening and some additional foodstuff[47] she would never have been able to survive five months. Fourth, the crematoria were not active volcanoes spewing fire and ashes. Against a favorite Holocaust denier claim,[48] flames, indeed, can shoot out from the chimneys if the ovens are run with overload,[49] which obviously frequently occurred during the "Hungarian Action" of May-July 1944, but no more later,[50] and therefore, in principle, could well have been observed by Chana on arrival, but not in October 1944. The rain of hot ashes, however, belongs to the realm of fantasy.

Astonishingly vague and colorless is the author's description of her social relations within the camp. We know, in principle, only two persons by name: Sabka, a Lithuanian Jewish girl, five years older than Chana, who she meets on the way back from Majdanek (46) and who becomes her intimate friend, and Dr. Mengele, her permanent torturer. Everybody else in the camp, prisoner or SS man or woman, remains anonymous. No mentioning of names of block or room elders, the persons with whom the prisoners had daily contact, and whose positions and duties she mixes up with that of a kapo (42).

Still more peculiar is that Chana has neither contacts with other children at Birkenau, nor with grown-ups. From reliable survivors' reports we know that, on the one hand, the children in the camps quickly set up informal groups, and on the other hand, that adult prisoners voluntarily took care of orphaned children and "adopted" them.[51] The general vagueness and anonymity of Mrs. Zisblatt's description of the social relations among the prisoners holds the more for the time Chana allegedly spends at Neuengamme, in the camp as well as in the factory, and during the death march.

Cases of non-Everyday Violence at Birkenau

In addition to the violence of everyday life, Chana is witness or victim of crimes that occur occasionally. For example, when an SS man, on arrival of a deportation train, picks "two toddlers up by their feet and smashed them against the truck. Their blood splattered and their cries ceased" (38). Or when another SS man with his boots crushes the head of a prisoner, who does not perform a push-up exercise correctly (41). Or when fellow prisoners must throw her into the cesspit on order of an unidentified "SS" (52).[52] Or when the Jews who observed Yom Kippur by fasting, are punished with five days of no food (69). When the Jewish girls who had provided explosives for the *Sonderkommando*'s mutiny, are publicly executed the day after, and Chana is "forced to march out to the gallows and to watch as the three girls were hanged" (72).

Chana one day makes a particularly horrible experience when she brings some water to her sick friend Sabka (55). "The kapo" reports her to "the SS in command" for "sabotage . . . She was trying to steal water" (56). As a punishment, she must stand for twelve hours (58) so close to the electric fence that she "would be electrocuted" if she stumbled, the whole time holding a brick with her arms stretched out (56). During this time she witnesses the arrival of several trains "coming from Hungary or from the Lodz ghetto" (56). Mothers desperately scream in "Polish and Hungarian," and "dead children [are] picked up by their legs, like slaughtered chickens, two in one hand" (57). She also "could see the flames from the pits where children and adults were being dumped alive to die by the fire" (58).

Though doubtlessly most of the reported atrocities did happen sometime at Auschwitz, it is improbable that a single, child prisoner experienced or witnessed all of them in a relatively short period of time. What is more, some of them are obviously exaggerated, for example having to stand with stretched arms and a heavy stone for twelve hours near the camp fence. What is more, Chana would have been shot without warning by one of the guards in the watch-towers if she had approached the electrified wire so closely.

Other events she simply could not have witnessed. Four - not "three" - Jewish women who provided explosives for the *Sonderkommando* were publicly executed on January 6, 1945,[53] more than two months after Chana must have left Birkenau according to her narrative. The open pits where corpses

were being burned during the "Hungarian action" (due to lack of crematorium capacity) were hidden behind a little wood and could not be observed directly from BIIc. She could have seen at most reflections from the flames, but never what was done there. Trains from Hungary and from the Łódź ghetto never arrived at the same time. The deportations from Hungary ceased on July 9, 1944, whereas the first transport from the Łódź ghetto arrived at Birkenau on August 15, 1944.[54] What is more, from BIIc Chana could not have heard voices from the "ramp."

Sabka's Story

In April 1942 (1), on the second day of Passover (9), "Nazi soldiers" round up the Jews of a village in the Lithuanian mountains, force them to dig a deep trench and line up at its edge, and shoot them all (7-8). Sabka, at that time sixteen years old (7), falls into the pit when her parents are shot (8). Unharmed, she creeps out of the pit after the killers have left and flees up into the mountains (9). Amidst the rocks she finds a cave with a well (10). There she is living "for almost two years, [s]urviving on stolen food and clothing" (18). But one day she is noticed by a local peasant woman, who informs the authorities. "Nazi officers and their dogs" search and eventually arrest her (18-19). She is marched downhill and loaded on a truck. After a journey of three days without food or drink, she arrives at Auschwitz, "her new home for the next eighteen months" (19-20). From the moment of their first encounter on the way back from Majdanek until liberation by U.S. troops, Sabka and Chana stay together all the time and share all experience.

This narration, however, also contains implausibilities. German and local Police units and SS *Einsatzgruppen*, indeed, frequently committed mass murder among the Jewish population of Lithuania in the manner described by Mrs. Zisblatt, and occasionally somebody survived such a massacre. But Sabka would have had serious problems in fleeing to "the mountains." Most probably Mrs. Zisblatt imagined Lithuania as a country similar to her native land, with mountains, rocks, and caves. But Lithuania is mostly flat lowland and has no mountain ranges. In the center there is a strip of rolling terrain, and in the east, Pleistocene glaciers have left hilly uplands with lakes interspersed. Nowhere in Lithuania Sabka would have found mountains with a cave in the rocks to hide. What is more, winters in Lithuania are really cold, and without making fire-which would have betrayed her at once-Sabka could not have survived a single winter in her cave.

Another problem arises (again) with chronology, which does not seem to be Mrs. Zisblatt's strong point at all. According to her story, Sabka was transferred to Neuengamme with the same transport Chana attended (77), i.e. in the second half of October 1944. If Sabka stayed at Auschwitz "for eighteen months," she must have arrived there at the end of April 1943. Then, however, either the shooting of the Jews of her village must have occurred already in 1941, or she had not been in the cave for two years.

The Medical Experiments

A considerable part of Mrs. Zisblatt's narration is filled by tales about medical experiments, to which Chana, Sabka, and other prisoners were subjected at Birkenau. As a collective measure "to destroy our reproductive organs," the SS is feeding the prisoners with chemicals in the soup (37, 70, 120, 158). In one of the rooms of the camp infirmary, Sabka and Chana see "scores of sick, emaciated Jews," whose blood is being drained, "three pints . . . from each prisoner," until they die (73). This Jewish blood is not intended for Germans, but "will be used to save the lives of Poles and the friends of the Germans who are helping them" (73-74). Later, in a hospital in Pilsen, she meets a Jewish woman who tells that her daughter died in Birkenau. She and another group of young girls were killed by draining "of their own blood for plasma for the German army and allies" (99).

There can be no doubt that a multitude of unethical, cruel, and even outright criminal medical experiments were performed by SS doctors (and paramedics) in the concentration camps. Mixing chemicals into the soup to make the prisoners infertile, however, is a typical urban legend known from penitentiaries worldwide. Though frequently reported by survivors, who this way explained themselves the loss of sexual desire (which was due, however, to permanent stress in combination with undernourishment), it was never done at Auschwitz. The draining of Jewish blood for purposes of the Wehrmacht is equally one of the many Holocaust myths.[55] In Mrs. Zisblatt's version, Jewish blood is only used for Poles and others who are helping the Germans in the extermination of Jews. This does not make the legend more trustworthy, as Poles were also "Aryans," though, in Nazi ideology, of a lower category than Germans. Instead it puts a share of the blame for the Holocaust on the Poles, an accusation considered by the Polish people as a slanderous lie.[56]

The most vivid descriptions Mrs. Zisblatt gives are about the experiments performed on her and Sabka by Dr. Mengele. The "Angel of Death" (43) is a pronounced sadist who gains satisfaction from bestially torturing (45, 54, 65) his "guinea pigs" (43, 57). Chana and four other girls receive "painful chemical injections" in their eyes (46). They are then confined for a period of five days (47) to a narrow, dark, "wet and cold prison cell," without food or drink, and where they can only stand upright (46-47). After release from the "dungeon" (46), Mengele examines the girls' eyes. Three have lost their eyesight, and Mengele sends them directly to the gas chamber (48). With Chana and Sabka,

"the experiment failed": the color of their eyes has not changed, and both return to their barracks (48).

Undoubtedly Mengele, camp physician at Birkenau, deserves a prominent place in the Medical Doctors' Hall of Shame. He experimented mainly on children who were twins or showed abnormalities, such as dwarfs, or those crippled from birth. He also studied *heterochromia iridis* (non-matching colors of eyes) and made experiments to find out whether the color of the iris could be changed artificially.[57] It is quite possible that Chana and the four other girls were subjected to such an eye experiment. This topic, therefore, shall not be discussed further in this analysis, which is restricted to inaccuracies, exaggerations, and implausibilities in Mrs. Zisblatt's memoir. For example, Mengele would not have sent the three of them who went blind to the gas chamber, where they would have been killed together with hundreds of other unfortunate people and burned immediately thereafter. He used to kill his "guinea pigs" himself and to supervise their autopsies.[58] Histological examinations of the test objects were part of his "research work." After all, Mengele saw himself as a "scientist."

It is also hardly believable that after the experiment the girls were confined to *Stehzelle* (standing cell) arrest, and that they survived there five days without food and drink. Committal to *Stehzelle* was a severe punishment meted out by the Political Department or the Camp Commandant,[59] never by an ordinary camp physician. We do not read about an "infraction" that would have made the commandant or the camp Gestapo send the girls to close arrest. What is more, in the known history of Auschwitz we never hear about standing cells filled "with water up to [the prisoners'] ankles" (46).

Some time after the eye experiment, Mengele begins to perform on Chana and Sabka a weeks-long series of cruel and painful injections under the fingernails (53, 54, 58). The second injection Chana receives causes blood poisoning, of which she cures herself (55). From the following injections, however, luckily neither she nor Sabka fall ill (58).

But Mengele performs the most remarkable experiment on both girls not in Birkenau, but in the main camp (the *Stammlager*) of Auschwitz (63). In the infirmary there, they are "strapped tightly onto rusty, metal tables" (63) With a suite of "six young SS men and women," Mengele enters the room and explains to them that he will show them how to remove the tattooed camp number from their arms (64). He then takes a huge syringe and draws, of course without anesthesia, "the sinew through my skin. Muscle and tissue and flesh all were drawn up" (65). Chana faints for pain. When she awakes, she hears Mengele ordering the nurse who assisted during the operation to kill the girls by an injection, "I mean the lethal one" (65).

The nurse, however, "work[s] for the underground" (67, 88). She gives the girls a phony injection. Mengele leaves the room, the nurse frees the girls and sends them to the adjacent room of the tuberculosis patients, which no SS man enters for fear of contagion, and asks them to wait. Some time after she returns with "a striped dress with a number sewn on the left shoulder" for each of them. She admonishes them to forget their old number and to never speak about what just happened to them. She then leads them to a new barracks and assigns them new bunks (66). "Sabka and I had prevailed over Dr. Mengele" (67).

Though the injection experiments described by Mrs. Zisblatt sound somehow strange, something like that could well have happened to Chana and her friend and, therefore, shall not be discussed here further. The tale of the removal of the prisoner numbers, however, is so full of implausibilities that it must be regarded as pure fantasy, and regretfully not as a good one. First, Mengele, a simple camp physician, by no means one of the camp brass, could never have dared to publicly remove the camp number, the one and only identification characteristic of a prisoner at Auschwitz,[60] from a prisoner's body. (Six other SS members were allegedly present!) Second, he need not have made an "experiment" to this effect, as methods of removal of tattoos were well-known, and these were far less painful as the procedure described by Mrs. Zisblatt. Third, it would not have made sense to kill the test subject immediately after an experiment that allegedly should serve to find out how to remove "membership and [...] blood type" tattoos from the bodies of SS men (64). It was an "experiment," and Mengele would have had to wait for its outcome, how the wound was healing, if scars would remain, etc. Let us not forget that he saw himself as a "scientist."

The most unbelievable thing, however, is the change of identity as described by Mrs. Zisblatt. In rare instances, the camp resistance movement did arrange such changes of identity, but only for prominent prisoners in imminent danger to life. It was a complicated procedure, needed quite a few initiated persons, and was always highly risky.[61] Chana and Sabka had neither connections nor "knew the right people," which would have had to manage the identity exchange. Mengele would have had to explain where the girls had gone, and the bodies of two girls of similar appearance and with Chana's and Sabka's camp numbers on their arms (!) would have had to be shown to prove that Chana and Sabka had not escaped. In these matters, the camp Gestapo did not tolerate sloppy work.

In the new block, the girls would at once have been recognized as alien, even if the camp numbers that they had received from the nurse were those of former inmates of the same block. Lack of a "triangle" and a camp number "sewn on the left shoulder" of the camp dress instead at the level of the

left breast would have aroused immediate suspicion. At any rate, at the next roll call the SS Blockführer would have noticed either that there were two new prisoners who had not been sent to the block by the Political Department (the camp institution that dealt with the prisoners' personal affairs and assigned the prisoners to the "blocks" (barracks)), or that two dead prisoners miraculously had resurrected. By the way, it is suspicious that Chana never means the new prisoner number she allegedly obtained and which she would have had to use from now on.

The Diamond Cycle

Let us now come to that part of Mrs. Zisblatt's life-story that provided the title for her memoir: the diamonds. Shortly before the Seigelsteins are deported, Chana's mother takes her daughter aside and shows her four small diamonds that she had saved from the Nazis (22): "I'm going to sew them into the hem of your skirt . . . Guard them closely and never sell them, unless you are hungry - then you may use the diamonds to buy bread" (23). When she has to undress on intake at Auschwitz, Chana tears the hem, removes the gems, and holds them tightly in her fist (35). When she sees that the newcomers are bodily searched, she swallows the diamonds (36). The next day, after roll call, she goes to the latrine, relieves herself unnoticed in a corner, and rummages through her own excrements until she finds all four diamonds. She hides them in a knot made at the end of her garment (42). She is firmly decided never to give away her mother's diamonds.[62]

Therefore, though not explicitly mentioned, she swallows her diamonds again before she has to undress for the selection for Majdanek (44). There she again retrieves the gems in the latrine (45). This procedure repeats itself until liberation. "The entire time I was incarcerated, I would swallow and retrieve my mother's diamonds again and again" (45). "At each selection, I swallowed" (52). She must have swallowed her diamonds also every time she was called for a medical experiment, or when she or her clothes were deloused (about which, by the way, we read nothing).

Knowing from numerous descriptions of undisputed Auschwitz survivors how appalling the sanitary conditions were particularly at Birkenau, that the number of latrine places for thousands of prisoners was absolutely insufficient, that the latrines could only be used for a short time in the course of a day, that there was not the tiniest little bit of privacy, and that prisoner functionaries (kapos) "directed traffic" inside with shouting, beating and insults,[63] it is inconceivable that Chana for months has been able to relieve herself undisturbed in some corner of the latrine and to retrieve her diamonds unnoticed.[64]

As the diamond episode is central in the marketing of Mrs. Zisblatt's book - and also in her contribution to the documentary *The Last Days* with the sub-title *Everything you are about to see is true* - Holocaust deniers hook up particularly on this part of her story. They say that the repeated swallowing of cut diamonds would have hurt Chanas esophagus and intestines, a statement I can neither prove nor disprove. Furthermore, they say that, given the appalling sanitary conditions at Birkenau - particularly the notorious lack of water and soap - Chana could not have sterilized her diamonds and sooner or later would have ingested life-threatening germs, an argument that cannot simply be dismissed. On the other hand, according to her story, Chana obviously did not have health problems with ingesting feces, as the *Stehzelle* episode shows. During the five days in this dungeon, the girls relieve themselves into the ankle-deep water in which they stand and drink the same water repeatedly (47), without becoming sick.

Escape From the Gas Chamber

As already mentioned, after Simchat Torah (October 10, 1944), but still before gassings ceased at Birkenau due to an order by Himmler given on November 1 or 2,[65] Chana is selected for the gas chamber (74) by Mengele himself, who, according to her video interview, recognizes her on roll call, wonders why she is still alive, and orders to take her out.[66] She is then attached to a Gypsy transport of whole families on their way to the gas chamber. For a moment she feels safe, "because families don't go together to the gas chamber . . . I thought . . . we're going to work somewhere . . . to another family camp."[67] In her book, however, the story reads somewhat different: "the SS" orders a second roll call, and she along with fifteen hundred other women are selected (74). They have to undress completely in the open. They then are herded into "the number three gas chamber," which, however, is "not big enough to accommodate all of us." Chana, being the last to enter, manages to cling to the door and so prevents the SS man in charge from closing it. Another SS man, obviously of a higher rank, angrily shouts at him: "Close the door so we can dispense the Cyclone B." The SS man at the door can see no other way out but to throw Chana "out onto the ramp." He shuts the door and disappears (75).

Naked, Chana runs away and hides "under the roof of the gas chamber" (75). There she hears the screaming of the dying, until "all was quiet, it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop."[68] Luckily no SS man is around, but a lone Hungarian boy, member of the *Sonderkommando*, appears, sees Chana, pulls her "from under the eave of the roof" and covers her with his "striped jacket" (75-76). He then leaves, but returns after some time and tells her that on the tracks besides the gas chamber a

train with open cars is waiting to take women prisoners to a labor camp. He wraps Chana up in a blanket[69] and flings the bundle high over the electrified wires directly into one of the open freight cars. Though there are already women in the car, no one speaks to Chana. Shortly thereafter, the train leaves Birkenau. (76)

This is the most implausible episode in Mrs. Zisblatt's story. Let us omit the not quite unimportant change that the beginning of her story underwent between her video interview and the writing of her book, and let us rather concentrate on the events in the gas chamber. First, if indeed a frail little girl would have clung to the door of the gas chamber and so prevented its closing, the SS man at the door would have made short work of her: either cramming her into the gas chamber by force, or simply killing her on the spot. Second, a glance at the pictures of crematorium III (or its mirror image, crematorium II) shows that there was no place "under the roof" where a person could hide.[70]

Third, when 1,500 people were gassed, quite a few SS men were in and around the crematorium building. Chana would under no circumstances have remained undetected. Neither when she was running from the gas chamber through the "ramp" (?) to the eave, nor when she went from there together with the young man from the *Sonderkommando* to the electrified fence, nor when she was thrown over it. Fourth, the young man must have been an athletics champion, as the distance between the railroad tracks and the fence around crematorium III was over 100 ft., the fence had a height of about 10 ft., and Chana weighed about sixty pounds.[71] Fifth, if there had been a train with open cars[72] waiting with prisoners near the crematoria, it would have been guarded by SS personnel who doubtlessly would have noticed the unconventional arrival of Chana by "air lift." And last not least, she would have been noticed at the latest at roll call on arrival, because her name would not have appeared in the transport list.

From Neuengamme to Pilsen

Some days after her departure from Birkenau, Chana arrives at night "in a labor camp in Neuengamme in Germany." In the morning, she realizes that Sabka has been on the same transport and even shares the room with her (77). For at least two months - until some day in January 1945 - Chana stays in this camp. She and Sabka are assigned to work "in the munitions factory during the day." Food is the same as at Birkenau: "thin soup" (79).

But in January 1945, "the five thousand prisoners in Neuengamme" are "assembled in the bitter cold" and marched off into the unknown (79). It is a long march, without rest and seemingly without aim, full of deprivations and fear: "Days became weeks and weeks became months." The weak are mercilessly shot, so that "after about two months on the death march, only about half of us were alive" (80). In "April . . . there were only a few hundred prisoners alive" (84). In a favorable moment, the girls succeed to escape (85-86). For several days, they roam through the Bohemian forests, until they, in the morning of May 7, 1945 (92) are found and liberated by U.S. soldiers (89). In the night, Sabka dies from typhus (94).

Chana, who also contracted this disease, is committed to a U.S. military "hospital near Pilzen, Germany" (97). A few days later, General Patton visits the hospital and makes "a special visit" to Chana's bedside. He interviews her about the camps and the death march, and when he leaves, he "pulled four buttons from his sleeves and a scarf that he wore around his neck and gave them to me to keep." Chana spends "two months in the hospital in Pilzen" (98), before she leaves Czechoslovakia for a DP camp at Salzburg, Austria (99).

Mrs. Zisblatt's narration remains rather vague in this chapter, but that what she reports about the death march tallies with nearly every death march survivor's account and, therefore, shall not be discussed here. Historically inaccurate, however, is the date of the evacuation of Neuengamme. Though some distant sub-camps were already evacuated at the end of March 1945, the evacuation of the main camp began not before April 8, 1945, and the prisoners were shuffled around in north central Germany. Only the five hundred male prisoners of sub-camp Bad Sassendorf were evacuated southward, by train until Ebensee in Austria, where they arrived on May 1, 1945.[73] It is also conspicuous that she does not remember the new number she must have been given on intake at Neuengamme and which replaced her name for at least half a year.

Whether Chana really met General Patton, and whether he gave her his scarf, is difficult to prove or disprove. Patton was, indeed, sometime in Pilsen,[74] and if there was a U.S. military hospital, he probably would have visited it, too. But contrary to British Field Marshal Montgomery, who liked scarves, he is never seen with a scarf on wartime pictures.

Revisiting Auschwitz Fifty Years After

After viewing *Schindler's List* in 1994, Mrs. Zisblatt decides to revisit Auschwitz as a participant in *The March of the Living* (138-141). There she recognizes Block 11 as the place where she and four other girls were confined to *Stehzelle* arrest (144). She then walks to "the number two gas chamber" in the

main camp (145). "When I got to the entrance I grabbed onto the door, and dug my fingernails into the blue wall that was still blue from the cyclone B gas; I could smell the gas that was still very strong" (146). The next day she is in Birkenau with the group. "I walked the path of my family, for my family, and for the six million souls who had perished in the number two gas chamber and crematory . . . The gas chamber was a pile of rubble . . . I could smell the gas embedded in the walls, green and blue from the cyclone B" (147).

Again we find inconsistencies and non-trivial inaccuracies. First, if she, indeed, was punished with *Stehzelle*, as a Birkenau prisoner, she would have served her sentence at Birkenau, not in the main camp that she also for the first time entered much later (according to her narration) on the occasion of the removal of her tattoo. But the standing cells of Birkenau have vanished, and visitors are shown those of the *Kommandaturarrest*, which was situated in the basement of Block 11 in the main camp. Second, neither in the (reconstructed) gas chamber of the main camp, nor in the rubbles of the Birkenau gas chambers and crematoria "cyclone B" can be smelled, nor are there "blue" or even "blue and green" stains from it on the walls. Every visitor can convince him/herself of this fact. Last but not least, with "six million gassed" Mrs. Zisblatt presents to the deniers one of their favorite straw-men used in their attempts to discredit serious Holocaust historiography.

A Provisional Appraisal

It was shown that Mrs. Zisblatt's Holocaust memoir does not stand scholarly scrutiny. As a whole, the story she tells about her camp experience leaves the impression that it was spiced up with ubiquitous Holocaust legends and enriched with fragments from other survivors' memoirs. It is so full of implausibilities that one can understand some of those who - in a "worst case scenario" - begin to doubt everything she tells. Since the only fellow prisoner whose name she remembers, Sabka, died at the very end of the war, it is also nearly impossible to cross-check her memoir with those of individuals who could be identified as having shared camp life with her.

There can be no doubt that most of the crimes and atrocities reported in *The Fifth Diamond* did happen sometime, at Auschwitz or another site of the *Final Solution*. It is utmost improbable, however, that a single prisoner, a child, too, experienced or witnessed all of them at the same place and within a short period of time. Mrs. Zisblatt certainly has survived the Holocaust, but her real life-story must be a different one. Which one, only she knows.

It is well possible that she personally believes what she tells, that her story is her "subjective truth." It becomes, however, problematic at the very moment when she goes public and her subjective truth, having become "objectivized" by the hallmark of "authenticity" as a survivor's alleged own experience, enters into conflict with common sense and the results of historical research.

Jewish and survivor organizations should take the issue in hand and search for clarification. Stories, such as Mrs. Zisblatt's, full of easily refutable details, are simply an easy target for the deniers. It is not sufficient to defend the historical truth about the Holocaust only against distortions from the deniers' side. Distortions from the side of exaggerators, mythmakers, and self-aggrandizers must equally be rejected. A matter as serious as the Holocaust demands serious, honest, and accurate treatment. Not least with regard to the dignity and the memory of those who perished.

Toward a Reconstruction of Irene Zisblatt's Biography

After having written the above, which restricts itself deliberately to an analysis of Mrs. Zisblatt's published memoir, I began to study the documents Holocaust denier Eric Hunt posted on his Web site (www.erichunt.net) and cross-checked them with my material about concentration camps and documents from the International Tracing Service (ITS), Bad Arolsen, Germany, with which Prof. Kenneth Waltzer from Michigan State University provided me. It gives an interesting picture of Mrs. Zisblatt's life-story, different, however, from that which she tells in her book and the video interview.

The first document from the "Eric Hunt collection" is a letter from the ITS, dated March 20, 1995, and shown in the documentary *The Last Days*. It gives the "inquirer's" name as "Irene Zisblatt Lewin," pointing to the fact that Mrs. Zisblatt once must have been a "Mrs. Lewin." We find there further an "Irene Segelstern, born in Sosnowitz on 28.12.1929, nationality Hungarian, was transferred from Concentration Camp Gross Rosen, Prisoner's Number 61397, to Concentration Camp Flossenbürg/Commando Helmbrechts, on 6th March 1945. Category: 'Sch.H. (=Schutzhaft), Jüdin.' "

The second document is part of a list of alien passengers traveling from Bremen to New York, departure October 29, arrival November 10, 1947, with S/S "Marine Flasher." This fits perfectly in Mrs. Zisblatt's narration. She writes that she arrived on November 8, 1947, after a ten days' journey (TFD:104). That means that she left Bremerhaven (the port city of Bremen) on October 29, in accordance with the passenger list. That the arrival dates given by her and on the list differ slightly and that she remembered the ship's name as "Marine *Fletcher*"does not pose any problem. On the list we find an "Irene Lewin, age 18, female, married, Polish nationality, quota Cz.Slov., destination Newark, NJ." She is traveling with "Alter Lewin, age 21, married, Polish nationality and quota,"

obviously her husband, and her brother-in-law, Elias Lewin.

Then there is an index card from the AJDC Emigration Service, Munich, from August 1947. It shows an "Irene Lewin, born VII.28.28 in Poleno, former nationality CSR, in transit from Salzburg, accompanied by Alter, Elias." The fourth document shows two pages of the Flossenbürg camp ledger. It shows that, on March 6, 1945, an "Ung.J. [Hungarian Jewess] Segelstein, Irene," born "28.12.1929," was taken in from Gross Rosen at Flossenbürg sub-camp Helmbrechts and obtained the prisoner number 63941. Document number five in this collection is a search result from the World Jewish Congress' database of Holocaust survivors. It shows a "Siegelstein, Irene", born at "Polena (H) [,] 16 y[ears]" old, liberated from "Civilian Hospital, Volary (CZ)." It tallies with the “List of Jewish Girls Now in Civilian Hospital at Volary, Czechoslovakia,” in the USHMM collections.[75]

In the "Kenneth Waltzer collection" there are copies of nine file cards, dating from 1949 to 1992, from the ITS archives. The most recent shows "Zeigelstein, Irene, od. Lewin od. Zisblatt," born "28.12.1928 Poleno, jüd. tschech." The older ones have different spellings of her name ("Segelstein" or "Segelstern") and show "28.12.1929" as date of birth - corrected, however, on the back in handwriting "28.12.1928" - and her nationality as "Hungarian." Two ITS file cards refer to a single page from an Auschwitz list of prisoners, the original of which can be found in the Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum under file nr. D-HygInst/7/No.inw.106156 Segr.50 str.285. There her name is spelled as "Zegelstein, Irén," the Hungarian version of her name.

I am convinced that all these documents refer to the same person, viz. Irene Weisberg Zisblatt of today. Unsurprisingly, there are real and seeming contradictions in the documents, which, however, can easily be resolved. Concentration camp prisoners' data are often erroneously recorded. Names are misspelled, dates of birth or transfer incorrectly written, and when lists were copied, copying errors occurred. They who have worked with such material know, however, how to deal with these "disturbances."[76]

The first thing we learn from the documents, by the way, is that Mrs. Zisblatt was "Irene" already at Auschwitz, that she did not receive this first name just on immigration, as she relates: "I panicked. ‘This is not my name ... Irene ... I have never heard of that name,' I cried" (TFD:103). It is, however, possible that she had "Chana" as an additional, Jewish, first name. Another small problem pose the different spellings of her family name. I would suggest that the original spelling is "Siegelstein," because this is a word from the German language (denoting the stone in a signet ring), and Jews in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire predominantly had German family names. I will, however, use in the following the spelling she gives in her memoir: "Seigelstein."

The older ITS documents give her place of birth as "Sosnowitz," a town in Upper Silesia, Poland. It does not tally with nationality "Hungarian" and must be regarded as a copying error, committed either at the Arolsen archives, or at one of the camps she was in. They also give her year of birth as "1929," obviously inherited from the Auschwitz list and later corrected. If she were born on December 28, 1929, she could not have been sixteen on liberation (May 6, 1945 – see later) and eighteen when she went on board of the ship that brought her to the U.S., contrary to the documents. The AJDC Munich file card has still another date of birth: July 28, 1928. If this date were correct, she would have been already nineteen on immigration. The date of birth December 28, 1928, therefore, most probably is the correct one.

The different nationalities given in the documents do not pose any problem at all. When Irene was born, Subcarpathia was part of the ČSR, and in 1939 its inhabitants received Hungarian citizenship. When she married the Polish citizen Alter Lewin (marriages of young people were quite common in the DP camps) in Austria, she obtained, according to the country's laws, his citizenship and his family name.

An interesting document is the Auschwitz list. It contains over 770 names of women, apparently all Jewish and Hungarian, from Block 8 of camp sector BIIc. The list has four columns: Serial Number, Family and First Name, Year of Birth, and Result (*Befund*). It is dated "28 IX 44," i.e. September 28, 1944. No prisoner numbers are mentioned. This clearly points to the fact that these Jewish women did not have prisoner numbers, which tallies with the well-known fact that the women from BIIc, the "transit Jews," were not registered and, therefore, did not have Auschwitz prisoner numbers. The list is on pages 281-288 of a file ("Volume 50") of documents from the SS Hygiene Institute Auschwitz, together with three similar lists for Block 7 (incomplete, running from serial no. 1 to 494, with date 27 IX 44, pp. 290-294), Block 10 (over 630 names, with date 29 IX 44, pp. 1-8), and Block 12 of BIIc (over 400 names, with date 29 IX 44, pp. 9-13). On pages 288, 8, and 13 we find a remark that, from the prisoners, "feces tests" (*Stuhlproben*) were made, which (luckily for them[77]) all had a negative result.

Unfortunately, for none of these lists a "cover letter" has survived from which it could unequivocally be seen to which purpose the feces of whole blocks of "transit Jews" were examined. The sheer masses of tests let us exclude that they were part of a Mengele experiment. Knowing, however, from documents from other camps that, at that time, the last Hungarian "transit Jews" were transferred for

slave labor into the Reich's interior, we can assume with certainty that this mass screening of feces served to certify that the prisoners to be shipped out were free from typhus and dysentery, frequently ravaging at Auschwitz. The accepting camps wanted to be certain that they did not receive carriers of contagious diseases.

An Attempt at Re-Writing Irene Weisberg Zisblatt's Biography

Let us now try to reconstruct Irene Weisberg Zisblatt's biography until her arrival at New York in November 1947. The following is an attempt, subject, of course, to corrections and completion to the same extent as additional information will appear.

December 28, 1928: Irene (Chana?) Seigelstein (Siegelstein?) is born in Polena, Subcarpathia, as a citizen of the Czechoslovak Republic.

April 1936: Irene starts school in the public elementary school of Polena.

March 1939: Subcarpathia returns to Hungary. Irene automatically receives Hungarian citizenship.

December 28, 1943: Irene becomes 15.

March 1944: After having served the compulsory eight years of school attendance, Irene leaves school.

April-May 1944: The Seigelstein family must leave their home in Polena and is committed to the Munkács brick factory ghetto.

Between May 15 and 24, 1944: The Jews from Munkács are deported to Auschwitz.

Between May 16 and 26, 1944: Irene arrives at Auschwitz. Being 15 ½ years old and healthy, she escapes gassing on arrival. She is not taken in (registered and tattooed with an Auschwitz prisoner number), but committed to Block 8 of sector BIIc of Birkenau, a transit camp for women.

June to September 1944: Such as all "transit Jews," Irene is only occasionally assigned to a work detail. She is lucky to survive the selections for the gas chamber frequently performed in this camp sector by Dr. Mengele and his colleagues.

September 28, 1944: Irene and her fellow prisoners from Block 8 are tested for contagious diseases transmitted via feces. The result is negative.

Immediately after September 28, 1944: Irene is transferred out to concentration camp Gross Rosen, where she obtains the prisoner number 61397 [78] and is sent to sub-camp Schlesiersee I. There she works in a munitions packing factory.[79]

December 28, 1944: Irene becomes 16.

January 21, 1945: Schlesiersee I is liquidated, the inmates marched on foot to Gross Rosen sub-camp Grünberg.[80]

January 28, 1945: The women from Schlesiersee I, together with half of the women of sub-camp Grünberg I,[81] are marched on foot in WSW direction, through Lower Silesia, Saxony, and the Thüringer Wald, into northern Bavaria.

March 5, 1945: After six weeks of marching in the depths of winter, Irene arrives at sub-camp Helmbrechts of concentration camp Flossenbürg.[82]

March 6, 1945: Irene is registered under number 63941 as a Flossenbürg prisoner. She and the other 620 sick and exhausted women who arrived together with her need not work, most probably because, at that time, the munitions factory, for which the Helmbrechts prisoners had to work, already lay idle.

April 13, 1945: Sub-camp Helmbrechts is liquidated. Its inmates are marched on foot in eastern, later SSE direction, through the Sudetenland.[83]

May 4, 1945: After three weeks of marching, Irene arrives at Volary (in German: Wallern). Together with about 120 emaciated, severely sick women she is left there in a makeshift camp.

May 6, 1945: Soldiers of the 5th Infantry Division ("The Red Devils," coat-of-arms: a diamond with a "5" in its center[84]), 3rd U.S. Army, liberate Volary and set up a field hospital for the sick women, who later are transferred to a civilian hospital where they stay until they are able to leave. Some of them remain there for about two months.

In the summer of 1945: Irene leaves Volary for a DP camp at Salzburg, Austria.

December 28, 1945: Irene becomes 17.

December 28, 1946: Irene becomes 18.

Still before August 1947: Irene marries Alter Lewin, a Polish citizen. She becomes "Mrs. Lewin" and obtains Polish citizenship.

October 1947: Irene, her husband, and her brother-in-law, Elias Lewin, receive immigration visa for the U.S. As Irene was born in Czechoslovakia, she is counted for the "Czechoslovak" immigration quota.

October 29, 1947: Irene goes on board of S/S *Marine Flasher* at Bremerhaven, together with her husband and his brother.

November 10, 1947: S/S *Marine Flasher* land in New York. Irene enters the U.S.

Final conclusion

My research clearly shows that Irene Weisberg Zisblatt is not only a survivor of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, but that she, indeed, has an interesting and instructive story to tell. A story of endless humiliations and extreme suffering, but also of survival against all odds. It would be similar to those that hundreds of survivors can tell or have already told. It certainly would be less adventurous than that which she tells. But it would be in accordance with the historically established facts. Irene Weisberg Zisblatt should tell her story about survival at Auschwitz without exaggerations and implausibilities. It then would be a really *true* story, worth to be told and retold and to be listened to.

(Acknowledgment: The author is greatly indebted to Sergey Romanov and Kenneth Waltzer for critical reviews of the manuscript and valuable hints to improving it.)

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[1] Emily Previti, "The story of a survivor: Woman tells local students of Auschwitz, therapy, revenge," *The Press*, Atlantic City NJ, April 28, 2009.

[2] Irene Weisblatt Zisberg with Gail Ann Webb. *The Fifth Diamond*. Dryden NY (Authors and Artists Publishers of New York) 2008, pp. xx+167. US$20.00. In quotations in the following abbreviated as TFD.

[3] In her memoir, Mrs. Zisblatt writes all Hungarian words phonetically, e.g. "Polena" as "Poleno" (TFD:1,152,153), "Nyilas" as "Nyilosh" (TFD:11,12), or "Kispalos" as "KishPolosh" (TFD:11,12,17). Polena today is called Поляна. It is situated six miles north of the next major town, in Hungarian Szolyva, in German Schwalbach, and today, in Ukrainian, Свалява.

[4] Before the end of World War I, Subcarpathian Ruthenia was a part of the Kingdom of Hungary. In 1920, it became part of the newly established state of Czechoslovakia. It returned to Hungary in March 1939. After World War II, it was annexed by the USSR and made part of the Ukrainian SSR. It today belongs to the Ukrainian Republic.

[5] TFD:1.

[6] She never mentions her year of birth. According to her memoir, she was thirteen on arrival at Auschwitz (TFD:42), and fourteen on liberation (May 7, 1945; TFD:92). A newspaper report from the end of February 2009 mentions her age as "now 78" (Benita Heath, "A Survivor's Story. Woman shares experiences of Holocaust," *The Ironton Tribune*, Ironton OH, February 26, 2009). All this points to 1931 as her year of birth. In her video testimony, however, she says that she was born in 1930. See also the last chapter of this essay.

[7] *The Press*, Atlantic City NJ, April 28, 2009.

[8] Mrs. Zisblatt was interviewed by Jennifer Resnick on October 21, 1995, at her home at Pembroke Pines FL. The videotaped interview has been posted on a Holocaust denier Web site (www.erichunt.net). Last accessed November 20, 2009.

[9] Producer: Steven Spielberg, director: James Moll. The sub-tile assures the viewer "Everything you are about to see is true."

[10] With the remarkable exception that she does not mention "soap-making" from the victims' corpses, the most common Holocaust legend.

[11] See, for example, the customer reviews of *The Fifth Diamond* at amazon.com.

[12] Siegfried Stadler, "Das durchschossene Herz. Wie die Instrumentalisierung von Buchenwald und das Schweigen der DDR nachwirken," in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Feuilleton, May 19, 1999.

[13] See e.g. Eckhard Gillen, *"Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit. Bernhard Heisig im Konflikt zwischen 'verordnetem Antifaschismus' und der Auseinandersetzung mit seinem Kriegstrauma. Eine Studie zur Problematik der antifaschistischen und sozialistischen Kunst der SBZ/DDR 1945-1989*. PhD dissertation, Heidelberg (Germany), 2002, pp. 176-177.

[14] Stated in April 2009 at Holy Spirit High School, Absecon NJ. Video clip embedded in the Web edition of the article in *The Press*, Atlantic City NJ, April 28, 2009.

[15] Antisemitic attacks by local Fascists from the *Nyilaskeresztes Párt* (Arrow Cross Party) made that, in the 1940s, more and more Jewish children moved to Jewish schools (E-mail to the author from Professor Randolph Braham, November 22, 2009), which in Subcarpathian Ruthenia operated "nearly until the time when, in 1944, the Jews of this region were deported to the extermination camps" (*Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, 1998, p.1419).

[16] Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, two Slovak Jews, escaped from Birkenau on April 7, 1944, and succeeded to reach Slovakia, where they went underground. They delivered one of the first (and one of the most detailed) reports about the mass extermination of the Jews at Auschwitz to the Allies and the Vatican. Excerpts appeared already in mid-1944 in the allied and neutral press. See Henryk Świebocki, "Escapes from the Camp," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. IV "The Resistance Movement." Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 191-235, here pp. 225-227.

[17] Today Мукачеве.

[18] See the list of transports, compiled by Michael Honey, in: *Research Notes on the Hungarian Holocaust*, July 14, 2008. On the Web: http://www.zchor.org/hungaria.htm. Last visited December 7, 2009.

[19] "Mengele" has become an icon of the Holocaust, which explains that, in memoirs, he is "sighted" even at times when he was not yet at Auschwitz. The phenomenon is comparable to that known from many Buchenwald liberators, who allegedly met Ilse Koch there, though she had left Buchenwald already at the end of August 1943 and never did return.

[20] Preferably, but not restricted to, pairs.

[21] Irena Strzelecka, "Experiments," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. II "The Prisoners, Their Life and Work." Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 347-369, here p. 358.

[22] "I was maybe four feet tall." Irene Zisblatt on the video tape, at the beginning of the scene where she tells about her escape from the gas chamber.

[23] See e.g. Fanciszek Piper, "The Methods of Mass Murder," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. III "Mass Murder." Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 63-204, here p. 111.

[24] Better known under its name in the camp jargon: "Sauna."

[25] Chana appears with this prisoner number also on TFD:43 and 64.

[26] Tadeusz Iwaszko, "The Housing, Clothing and Feeding of the Prisoners," in: : *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. II "The Prisoners-Their Life and Work." Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 51-63, here p. 57-58.

[27] According to the Auschwitz Prisoners Data Base, A. Pastuszek was born on January 16, 1896, and died at Auschwitz on December 2, 1943.

[28] Danuta Czech. *Kalendarz wydarzeń w KL Auschwitz*. Oświęcim (Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum w Oświęcimiu-Brzezince) 1992, p. 516.

[29] Ibid., pp. 662 to 673.

[30] "Recycling" of prisoner numbers concerned only "reeducation prisoners," who were committed to

Auschwitz for a limited time. After release or death, their numbers were reassigned to new arrivals. See Tadeusz Iwaszko, "Reasons for Confinement in the Camp and Categories of Prisoners, in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. II "The Prisoners – Their Life and Work" Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 11-43, here p. 25. The date for change of this procedure is from Czech, *Kalendarz*, p. 130.

[31] Irena Strzelecka and Piotr Setkiewicz, "The Construction, Expansion and Development of the Camp and Its Branches," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. I "The Establishment and Organization of the Camp." Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 63-138, here pp. 98-99.

[32] The name of the city, Lublin, is not mentioned in the book.

[33] In Poland, considered as "anti-Polonism" and offensive.

[34] Markings with (red) oil paint were applied on civilian clothes issued to prisoners, but never on the striped camp uniform. Iwaszko, *The Housing, Clothing and Feeding*, p. 58.

[35] Interview for the Shoah Foundation.

[36] Arthur L. Smith jr. *Die Hexe von Buchenwald. Der Fall Ilse Koch*. Weimar (Böhlau) 1995, p. 83.

[37] See, e.g., Joachim Neander, "The Impact of the 'Jewish Soap' and 'Lampshades' Legends on Holocaust Remembrance," in: *Trajectories of Memory: Intergenerational Representations of the Holocaust in History and the Arts*, ed. Guenther, Christina, and Beth Griech-Polelle. Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Cambridge Scholars Press), 2008, pp. 51-77.

[38] Czech, *Kalendarz*, p. 777-779.

[39] Piper, *The Methods of Mass Murder*, p. 173.

[40] Strangely written as "*zeil appel*," also on pages 46, 61, and 65.

[41] "It was nothing in sight except barbed wire and snow." Interview for the Shoah Foundation, scene where she escapes from being gassed.

[42] In some instances, the "stones" (or "rocks") are specified as "bricks" (40, 59).

[43] In Auschwitz camp jargon, *Kanada* were the warehouses where the property of the murdered Jews was stored.

[44] Similarly, pp. 69 and 72.

[45] Birkenau never had more than four crematoria, and since, on October 7, 1944, crematorium IV was destroyed in the *Sonderkommando* mutiny, after that event, not more than three crematoria could have been operating at the same time.

[46] Irena Strzelecka, "The Working Day for Auschwitz Prisoners," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. II "The Prisoners – Their Life and Work." Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 65-70, here p. 68.

[47] Iwaszko, *The Housing, Clothing and Feeding*, p. 61.

[48] Stating that flames never could have been blazing up from the Birkenau crematorium stacks. Carlo Mattogno offers a more nuanced argument, agreeing that the phenomenon is possible, but only at times "because it depends essentially on the accumulation of a sufficiently thick layer of soot", see "Flames and Smoke from the Chimneys of Crematoria," *The Revisionist* 2(1)/2004, pp. 73-78. He also accepts the reality of smoke from chimneys.

[49] "Smoke & Flames from the Chimneys & the Candle," *The Nizkor Project*, 1997. On the Web: http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/camps/auschwitz/crematoria/smoke-flames-01.html. Last accessed November 30, 2009.

[50] Nuremberg Document USSR-8 of May 6, 1945. *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945-1 October 1946*, Nuremberg 1947-1950, vol. XXXIX, pp. 241-261, here p. 251.

[51] See e.g. Helena Kubica, "Children and Adolescents in Auschwitz," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945.*

Central Issues in the History of the Camp, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. II "The Prisoners – Their Life and Work" Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 201-290. For Hungary, see pp. 231-133; for adults helping children, pp. 273-277

[52] It is even not clear whether this "SS" is a man or a woman.

[53] Czech, *Kalendarz*, p. 831.

[54] Ibid., pp. 707 and 732.

[55] Its kernel of truth may be that, in 1944, the "Aryan" German concentration camp prisoners were asked to donate blood for the front. As far as the author knows, the result was - understandably - very meager.

[56] Punishable by Polish penal law with imprisonment of up to three years.

[57] About his experiments on children, see e.g. Kubica, *Children and Adolescents*, pp. 261-267.

[58] Ibid., pp. 263-264.

[59] For details, see Irena Strzelecka, "Punishment and Torture," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. II "The Prisoners – Their Life and Work" Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 371-398, here pp. 382-384.

[60] Iwaszko, *Reasons for Confinement*.

[61] Henryk Świebocki, "Mutual Aid and Solidarity," in: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, ed. Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, vol. IV "The Resistance Movement." Oświęcim (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum) 2000, pp. 43-62, here p. 51. The cases presented there, however, concern only a change in the prisoner category, not a complete identity change.

[62] She succeeds in saving them and brings them with her to America. She herself is "the fifth diamond" (TFD:xvi).

[63] Iwaszko, *The Housing, Clothing and Feeding*, p. 56.

[64] There is, however, one exception: One day, "an SS" noticed Chana, screamed at her and ordered the prisoners to throw Chana into the latrine. Luckily Chana already had retrieved her gems (52). This event, however, is also doubtful, as SS personnel always held quite a big "personal distance" from the prisoners latrines.

[65] Piper, *The Methods of Mass Murder*, p. 173.

[66] At the beginning of her narration about her escape from the gas chamber on the video tape, not mentioned in her book.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., some time later on the tape.

[69] Ibid., at the end of the episode on the tape, but not in the book.

[70] Photographs of the time and drawings are easily to find on the Web sites of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum or the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

[71] Videotape, at the end of the gas chamber episode.

[72] "Gondolas" in U.S. railway parlance. Such cars were, in some instances, used for evacuation transports in 1945, when no box cars were available. Their use for prisoner transfer transports in 1944 has not been documented. The SS did not like gondolas much, because they needed four times as many guards than a closed box car. See e.g. a picture in Joachim Neander, *Das Konzentrationslager Mittelbau in der Endphase der NS-Diktatur*, Clausthal-Zellerfeld (Papierflieger) 1997, p. 341. In each corner of the gondola, a guard was placed.

[73] See Katharina Hertz-Eichenrode (ed.), *Ein KZ wird geräumt. Häftlinge zwischen Vernichtung und Befreiung. Die Auflösung des KZ Neuengamme und seiner Außenlager durch die SS im Frühjahr 1945*. 2 vols. Bremen (Edition Temmen) n.d.

[74] Which, by the way, never was "in Germany," not even under German occupation.

[75] Copy sent to me by Prof. K. Waltzer.

[76] Otherwise I would never have been able to track the camp odyssey of a group of (mostly Hungarian) Jewish women through nine camps. Joachim Neander, "Auschwitz-Grosswerther-Gunskirchen," in: *Yad Vashem Studies* XXVIII (2000), pp. 287-310.

[77] Otherwise, they would have risked being killed, as potential carriers of diseases.

[78] This is exactly the number she allegedly received at Auschwitz and that was removed there by Mengele. Note that Gross Rosen (such as all concentration camps except Auschwitz) did not tattoo prisoner numbers.

[79] In a letter from December 14, 2009, the Gross Rosen Museum wrote me that, "according to the chronology of transports to Gross Rosen, the number 619397 was issued in the middle of September 1944." It appears in a "reconstructed [i.e. not original] list of Jewish women prisoners who, among other places, were at the Schlesiersee sub-camp." Schlesiersee had two camps, I and II. Most of the women at Schlesiersee were employed in digging anti-tank ditches. Some from Schlesiersee I, however, worked for one "Firma Kraus" (http://www.gross-rosen.pl/filie; last accessed December 23, 2009), which might have been an enterprise in the armaments industry.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] http://www.juden-in-mittelsachsen.de/erinnerungsweg/schlesiersee.html. Last accessed December 9, 2009.

[83] The Helmbrechts death march has been discussed in great detail by Daniel J. Goldhagen: *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, New York (Alfred A. Knopf) 1996, pp. 330-363.

[84] The unit was also called "The Red Diamonds." Do we here have the origin of Mrs. Zisblatt's diamond episode? For details of the liberation of Volary and pictures of liberated women see the 5th Inf. Div.'s Web site: http://www.gjt.cz/includes/military/DMUS/dmus.htm. Last accessed December 10, 2009.

Posted by HC Guest Blogger at Saturday, January 09, 2010

Labels: Auschwitz, by: Joachim Neander, guest blogger, Irene Zisblatt

16 comments:

Roberto Muehlenkamp Sunday, January 10, 2010 5:00:00 pm

Dr. Neander, thanks for honoring HC with this brilliant piece of scholarship!

Reply

Unknown Monday, January 11, 2010 12:27:00 pm

Excellent Work, Dr. Neander.

Thanks for showing the difference between critical analysis and mindless Denial like the examples by Bishop and Yeager that were recently added to this blog.

Reply

Sergey Romanov Monday, January 25, 2010 2:53:00 am

Response to Yeager:

http://holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.com/2010/01/yeager-vs-neander.html

Reply

Sergey Romanov Wednesday, February 03, 2010 5:33:00 pm

Dr. Neander's response to Yeager:

http://holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.com/2010/02/response-to-c-yeager.html

Reply

kineton Sunday, March 21, 2010 8:25:00 pm

I most strenuously object to your endorsement of the the patently illogical notion propagated by Elie Wiesel, which you cite with approval i.e., "Some stories are true that never happened." You claim that Elie Wiesel "reminds us" of this, but this verbal sleight of hand is too transparent. You speak as if this logical falsehood is a a self-evident truth that we had somehow forgotten but fortunately Elie Wiesel has thoughtfully reminded us of it. You explain that "Elie Wiesel had in his mind stories that, though being fictional, contain a deeper truth and comply with certain logical and literary standards." But stories that are fictional are by the same token untrue. A falsehood is never true at any level, however deep, except perhaps in gnostic mystical thinking, which has no place in a discussion of purportedly historical events.

Reply

Replies

Jennifer Wednesday, November 13, 2019 11:40:00 pm

Did you read literally nothing else in this entire essay?

Reply

Adina Monday, May 07, 2012 5:02:00 pm

Irene was 8-18 years old when this happened to her. She kept all the horror that was her childhood inside herself for over 40 years.
I am 18 and I can barely remember things that happened to me when I was 9, 10, 11 years old. Imagine the terrible, awful things that happened to her at that age and then how long she kept them inside and try to put yourself in her shoes. Would you remember every detail factual? Or would things get a little mixed up after all those years?

Reply

Jonathan Levy Saturday, October 06, 2012 9:32:00 pm

the diamond story is actually Pulp Fiction theft. That story is ridiculous.

Reply

Truthluvr Sunday, March 22, 2015 6:12:00 am

Fascinating article. Please note, though, that the text is missing the reference to footnote 84.

Reply

Unknown Tuesday, October 27, 2015 8:03:00 pm

No one has claimed that every tiny detail remembered by an elderly woman from a time of horror as a young teenager would ever be completely factually or chronologically correct. The extent of your parsing out of every detail is absurd and disrespectful, as unless you doubt that she was every in a concentration camp, which you appear to have no reason to do, we have NO reason to disbelieve that the main feel and points of her story are correct.

Even from the beginning of this blog, your assumption is that "if her former school was closed and used as a transit camp for deportations in 1944, it must have been a Jewish and not a public school": why? If enrollment in public schools were depleted by disallowing Jewish students to attend, it is more than likely that some were combined to leave some of the buildings available for other purposes (such as, for example, transit camps for deportations).

Your citation #15 supposedly confirming that "the Jewish laws issued in Hungary between 1939 and 1941 did severely restrict the number of Jewish students in secondary and high school education, but did not affect primary schooling" does not do so.

There were MANY families who hid in attics, in cellars, underneath barns, and elsewhere "without light and fire for heating or cooking" for fear of being found due to light or smoke. Why would you doubt this individual's story just because it has "similarities to the story of Anne Frank?" No one has claimed that the Franks were unique in their attempt to hide for their lives.

Sure, Mengele was most interested in twins or people with physical abnormalities. This does not mean that he ONLY selected such children, or that it is impossible that a child not fitting these characteristics could be selected.

The number is questionable; as it was removed, it is certainly likely that she could have remembered her number wrong; and while dental fillings were removed from the dead, this does not mean that it is implausible or never happened to living prisoners, especially towards the end of the war, when the Nazi party was likely getting more desperate and ruthless.

Reply

Replies

Jennifer Wednesday, November 13, 2019 11:42:00 pm

You're presuming that her number WAS removed, when the much more plausible explanation is that she never had one.

Reply

Unknown Tuesday, October 27, 2015 8:04:00 pm

(cont.)

Why on earth would it be a "Holocaust stereotype" that to a young woman living in prisoner's garb, any civilian clothing would look to her to be "beautifully dressed" people in the street?

Again I take issue with your certainty of "never" - markings were "never" applied on the striped camp uniform. Usually not, sure, and not to the knowledge of an author who researched this area; and moreover, it is more than plausible and understandable if a child misremembered which article of clothing had the label painted on.

"…to become a lampshade…" citation #45 - your citations are inaccurate. This citation is about the number of crematoria. None of the surrounding citations speak to human skin lampshades either. Further, even if this horrid end did not come to pass, this does not mean it was not planned, and is not automatically "debunked." There is no reason that Koch could not have been interested in both "women with beautiful skin" and "well-built men with gorgeous tattoos," though the tattoo reference is confusing - the prison camp number tattoos? Jews would generally avoid tattoos, so who this could refer to is unclear.

Sure, so it seems that she was there about 5 months and not 8. I'm sure that 5 months was an eternity for the conditions they were in. I can't fault someone for believing it was 8 months without the factual dates spelled out for them.

Oh boy, when she said "one bowl of watery soup per day," and forgot to add a daily morsel of bread, let's call her out and call her a liar! Really? For all we know the bread could even already have been soaked in and disintegrated into the watery soup, or they didn't get it every day. Good grief. Pointing out minute inconsistencies in an elderly lady's memories of inhumane conditions as a young girl to you is a worthy cause?

Why do you disbelieve that ashes could have been scattered from the crematoria? Sure, they may not have been hot, but even the knowledge of what the ashes are from can burn to the touch and in one's memory.

You question why she had no relationships with children - at 13, she had been told to say she was 20, and could not then associate with the children's groups.

Reply

Replies

Jennifer Wednesday, November 13, 2019 11:44:00 pm

As has been covered elsewhere on this blog and was even internally linked, the tattooed men were generally Polish Gentile inmates.

Reply

Unknown Tuesday, October 27, 2015 8:05:00 pm

(cont.)

Certainly, in normal life, it would be extremely "improbable that a single, child prisoner experienced or witnessed all of them in a relatively short period of time. THIS WAS NOT NORMAL LIFE. Atrocities like these WERE occurring every day. You have NO basis to assume that just because it seems "improbable" that one prisoner would have witnessed these horrifying events, they could not have done so. Same for your assumption that if she "had approached the electrified wire so closely" she would have been shot, when she specifies that she was ORDERED to stand there holding the brick, NOT that she approached it of her own free will.

How are doubting the substance of her story just because of reasons such as she thought the trains arrived at the same time, which you proclaim "never" happened (even if on the same track, one could arrive right behind the other!); if she saw smoke or perhaps "reflections of flames," or even saw bodies being transported to the open pits, and knew what happened to them even if she couldn't directly, does this change anything in her story if she said that she could see the flames? No, it does not. You also give no reason for your proclamation that she "could not have heard voices from the "ramp"" - how far was she? Even if people on the "ramp" were yelling? Are there nearby locations she could have been

referring to?

Further, give me a break with taking such issue with her emotional response to her return to the camp in that she believed she could still smell the gas and see stains on the walls, or felt that she had walked the path to the main camp at an inaccurate time. Do you have any idea what kind of flashbacks and horrors would flash behind your eyes and nose if you had seen the trauma that these prisoners had seen? Neither do I, but you have no more reason than me to claim that an emotional response like this equates to "inconsistencies and non-trivial inaccuracies." Obviously she did not mean literally that there were "six million gassed," but six million lives ruthlessly extinguished, many of whom were gassed. This is an emotional response. She is not stating the fact of the method of death used upon them as a whole.

Certainly, perhaps some of her memories are actually stories told to her that she internalized. However, nothing is so "utmost improbable" that one young prisoner could not have "experienced or witnessed all of them at the same place and within a short period of time" in this horridly dark time in our recent history. Her details are not so "refutable" as you claim, if you have some human decency, as you appear to at some points, to understand that some exaggerations of memory or internalization of another's story are more than understandable, and does not detract from her, or so many others', breathtakingly horrible experiences.

Reply

Replies

Jennifer Wednesday, November 13, 2019 11:47:00 pm

How exactly would a watchman high in a tower have known she was under orders?

Reply

Sergey Romanov Sunday, May 08, 2016 1:06:00 pm

Mrs. Weisberg's response is, unfortunately, full of inaccuracies and misses the main point.

For example she writes: ""…to become a lampshade…" citation #45 - your citations are inaccurate. This citation is about the number of crematoria. None of the surrounding citations speak to human skin lampshades either."

But as anyone can see, "45" is not a footnote number, it's a page number. The footnote number is 37. Then:

"Further, even if this horrid end did not come to pass, this does not mean it was not planned, and is not automatically "debunked." There is no reason that Koch could not have been interested in both "women with beautiful skin" and "well-built men with gorgeous tattoos," though the tattoo reference is confusing - the prison camp number tattoos? Jews would generally avoid tattoos, so who this could refer to is unclear. "

Since the whole Koch/lampshade story is a legend, yes, Zisblatt's story is effectively debunked - as much as it is possible to debunk something in history. But Mrs. Weisberg also missed that the story could not have happened if only because Koch had been imprisoned by that time for many months. Which automatically means that this crime "was not planned", contrary to Mrs. Weisberg's hypothetical.

"Why do you disbelieve that ashes could have been scattered from the crematoria?" - because ashes do not "spew" from chimneys.

"The number is questionable; as it was removed," - here Mrs. Weisberg simply ignores the fact that Mrs. Zisblatt hadn't been tattoed in the first place, as explained in the article. So there was no number to remove.

"and while dental fillings were removed from the dead, this does not mean that it is implausible or never happened to living prisoners, especially towards the end of the war, when the Nazi party was likely getting more desperate and ruthless" - except there is no evidence that it was done.

Indeed, Mrs. Weisberg's whole defense is based on what "could" have been - however historically improbable. But as Dr. Neander points out:

"There can be no doubt that most of the crimes and atrocities reported in The Fifth Diamond did happen sometime, at Auschwitz or another site of the Final Solution. It is utmost improbable, however, that a single prisoner, a child, too, experienced or witnessed all of them at the same place and within a short period of time. Mrs. Zisblatt certainly has survived the Holocaust, but her real life-story must be a different one. Which one, only she knows."

While almost each element of the story "could" have happened, even if improbably, when you sum up all the improbable elements, you see that the whole is even more improbable than its parts. Contrary to Mrs. Weisberg, the improbability of these things has nothing to do with abnormality of life in Auschwitz. Rather, these things were historically improbable. Is it physically possible that gold teeth were removed from the living? Yes, but there is no evidence that it was so, so while possible, it's improbable. Is the

diamonds story physically possible? The bare possibility is there, but it's completely improbable. Add each improbable element explained in the article here and you get the picture. And yes, some, maybe all of it can be explained by malleability of human memory. But while that explains the distorted testimony, it doesn't save its credibility.

While Mrs. Weisberg's defense of Mrs. Zisblatt's book is well-intentioned, it misses the mark. Mrs. Zisblatt is a true survivor, but the value of her book and of her testimony as it exists now remains dubious.

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THE BLOGS

George R. Mastroianni

FEATURED POST

Questionable testimony in Holocaust doc is grist for deniers

The award-winning documentary 'The Last Days' was rereleased but there are serious doubts about the veracity of the recollections of a survivor featured in the film

Irene Zisblatt in 'The Last Days' (Screenshot from YouTube)

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The film "The Last Days," released in 1998 and awarded an Oscar for Best Documentary Feature, was re-released in May this year. The film recounts the stories of five Holocaust survivors enmeshed in the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews of Hungary in the summer of 1944.

The subtitle of the James Moll film is "Everything You're About to See is True." But the testimony of Irene Zisblatt may challenge that claim. Independent scholar Joachim Neander analyzed Zisblatt's testimony and raised concerns about the factual accuracy of some of the elements of her story. For example, Zisblatt says that teeth with gold fillings were torn from the mouths of newly arrived prisoners: this was not done at Auschwitz. Gold was only removed from the bodies of those who had already been murdered by the Nazis.

Ms. Zisblatt says that the day after arriving at Auschwitz, she was transferred to Majdanek. She claims that she was sent there because the camp commandant, Ilse Koch, was seeking young women with beautiful skin to use for the production of lampshades. Koch could not have been at Majdanek: she was in prison in Weimar, arrested by the SS for corruption.

Other parts of Zisblatt's narrative cannot be tested directly but strain credulity nevertheless. Zisblatt's book The Fifth Diamond includes this story: given four diamonds by her mother, she was able to keep them in her possession throughout her captivity by repeatedly swallowing them and retrieving them from her own excrement. Neander suggests that this is implausible given the realities of camp life: latrines were grossly insufficient for the number of prisoners, who were provided access to them infrequently and briefly, constantly harassed by *kapos*.

Zisblatt claimed that she was the last person driven into a gas chamber, but pushed away from a guard, hid near the crematorium, and was thrown over a fence into a train leaving the camp by a young *Sonderkommando* prisoner. The gassing process was such that an escape like this was improbable. Even so, Neander reports that the fence over which Ms. Zisblatt says she was thrown was ten feet high, and was some one hundred feet from the railroad track. Hurling a sixty-pound person high enough and far enough to land in the open boxcar seems impossible.

The foregoing is only a small sample of the many problems with Zisblatt's testimony. Neander's essay questioning Zisblatt's testimony appeared in 2010. After a presentation by Zisblatt at a New Jersey middle school a few months later, controversy erupted when a student posted concerns about the accuracy of Zisblatt's testimony on social media: she was reportedly bullied for challenging a Holocaust survivor. At least two Holocaust deniers have attacked Zisblatt's testimony. It seems surprising, then, that the doubts about Zisblatt's testimony have not been systematically addressed by her or those involved in *The Last*

Days. Perhaps the Shoah Foundation, or the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, should review the concerns raised about the accuracy of Zisblatt's testimony.

There is precedent for investigating legitimate doubts about survivor testimony. Deli Strummer was a popular and prolific speaker for the Baltimore Jewish Council. Strummer's testimony was challenged, and the Council commissioned an investigation into Strummer's testimony in 1999 by Lawrence Langer and Raul Hilberg. These scholars investigated Ms. Strummer's testimony and advised the Council that her testimony was inaccurate and unreliable.

One reason that the accuracy of survivor testimony should concern us is that Holocaust deniers capitalize on instances of false testimony. Of course, we should never dignify the outrageous claims made by deniers by taking them seriously. But, should we also ignore potentially credible claims about the accuracy of survivor testimony, merely because those claims have been hijacked by deniers? If we let our fear of being associated with deniers prevent us from exposing real mistakes in survivor testimony, who are we helping?

It is, and should be, difficult and painful for us to raise questions like this about survivor testimony. Irene Zisblatt experienced horrific persecution by the Nazis. She lost most of her family to the Holocaust. She has worked tirelessly to remind an increasingly under-educated public of what happened, and she deserves our utmost respect.

But we can honor Irene Zisblatt and honor the truth at the same time. Hopefully, her testimony will be judged to be credible. If her testimony does not withstand such scrutiny, if some of the stories she tells are distortions, fabrications, or exaggerations, these are likely the result of failures of her memory of the sort that plague us all. Irene Zisblatt did not begin talking about her Holocaust experiences until 1994 when the public square was flooded with films, books, and speeches about the Holocaust.

Many of us mistakenly adopt information like this. There is no shame in misremembering events, or in misattributing other's experiences as our own. It would, however, be a shame to perpetuate falsehoods, even well-intentioned ones, when we have the means to set the record straight. The stakes are too high to let our solicitude for the feelings of a single survivor jeopardize our commitment to always telling the truth about the Holocaust.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Mastroianni is an experimental psychologist, Professor Emeritus at the United States Air Force Academy. He currently teaches in the M.P.S. Psychology of Leadership program in the World Campus at the Pennsylvania State University. His recent books include Of Mind and Murder: Toward a More Comprehensive Psychology of the Holocaust; Misremembering the Holocaust: The Liberation of Buchenwald and the Limits of Memory; and Rumors of Injustice: The Cases of Ilse Koch and Rudolph Spanner. Visit his website www.georgemastroianni.com.

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R **RedSailboat**
9 August, 2021
Every kind of witness may lie or be mistaken. There is no reason why it should not happen to certain Holocaust survivors.
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O **OrangeCarrot**
6 August, 2021
Extreme trauma leads to memory loss. Maybe she reconstructed it in a way she could cope with - like in the Life of Pi.
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G

GoldController

6 August, 2021

To all of you out there who are now putting Jews from the holocaust under immense scrutiny about their holocaust story, let us remember one thing--there was an attempt by Germany to murder all the Jews of the world. Germans did this by some of the events described by Zisblatt. Yes, she was arreste...**See more**

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B

BlueLeaf

5 August, 2021

compare fiction of Jerzy Kosinski's The Painted Bird (he was hidden by Polish farmers during WW II), and part of Majdanek in Martin Gray's "In the name of my people", which was not true. Both good books to read though.

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O

OliveDice

5 August, 2021

Important article. Truth about the Holocaust is most important. Don't ever give Holcaust deniers an excuse to question its veracity.

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